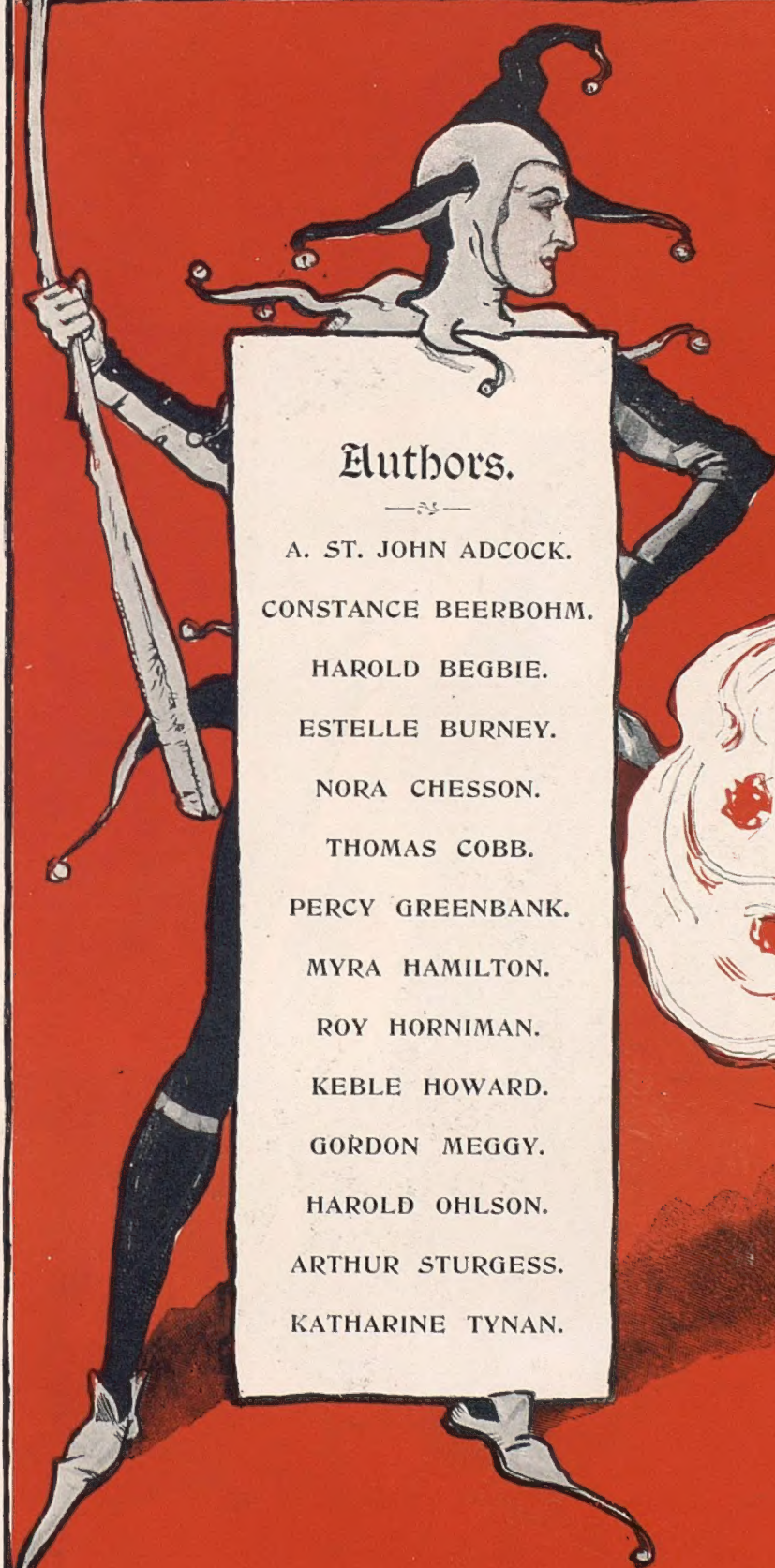


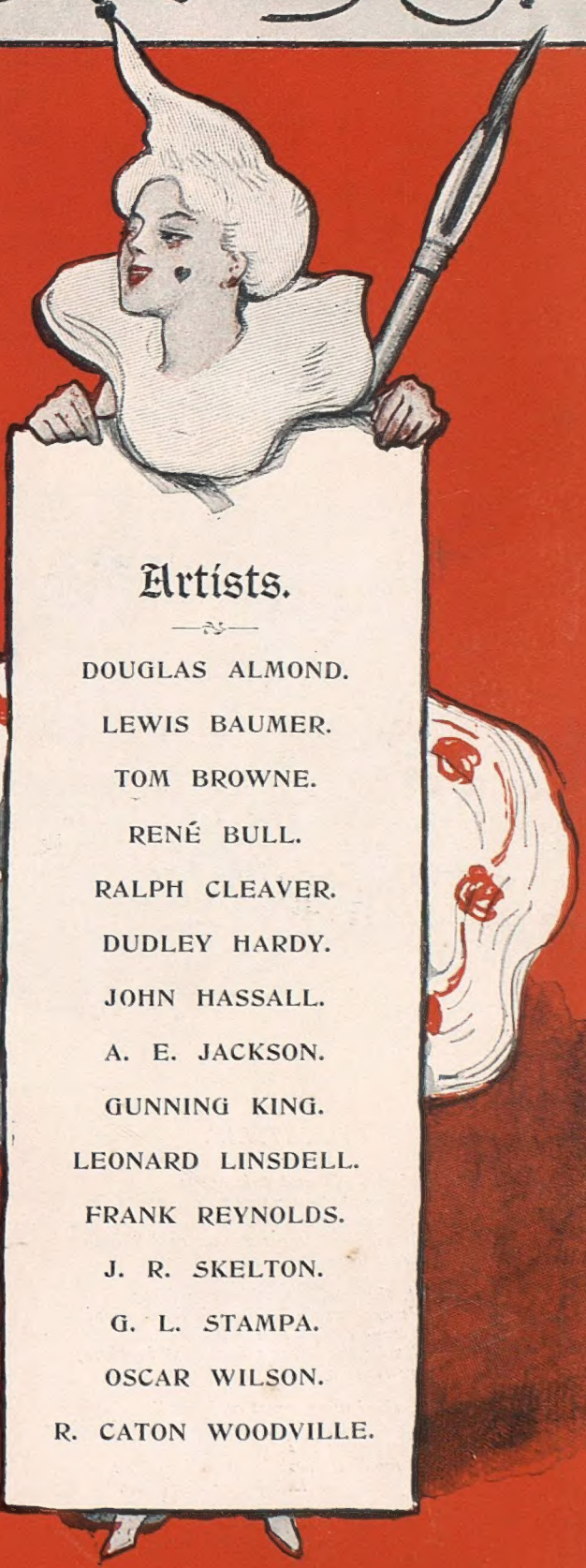
# THE SKETCH CHRISTMAS NUMBER. 1903.



A stylized illustration of a jester or clown figure, dressed in a dark suit with a white ruffled collar and a pointed hat with three small balls. The figure is holding a long sword in their right hand and a large white rectangular list of authors in their left arm. The background is a solid red color.

## Authors.

A. ST. JOHN ADCOCK.  
CONSTANCE BEERBOHM.  
HAROLD BEGBIE.  
ESTELLE BURNEY.  
NORA CLESSON.  
THOMAS COBB.  
PERCY GREENBANK.  
MYRA HAMILTON.  
ROY HORNIMAN.  
KEBLE HOWARD.  
GORDON MEGGY.  
HAROLD OHLSON.  
ARTHUR STURGESS.  
KATHARINE TYNAN.



A stylized illustration of a woman with blonde hair, wearing a white ruffled collar and a dark dress. She is holding a large white rectangular list of artists in her left arm and a quill pen in her right hand. The background is a solid red color.

## Artists.

DOUGLAS ALMOND.  
LEWIS BAUMER.  
TOM BROWNE.  
RENÉ BULL.  
RALPH CLEAVER.  
DUDLEY HARDY.  
JOHN HASSALL.  
A. E. JACKSON.  
GUNNING KING.  
LEONARD LINSDELL.  
FRANK REYNOLDS.  
J. R. SKELTON.  
G. L. STAMPA.  
OSCAR WILSON.  
R. CATON WOODVILLE.

*Dudley Hardy '03*



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### CHRISTMAS.

Withered and old and pale to see,  
The Year that once was warm and fair  
Walks in a white world wearily,  
With withered leaves wound in her hair  
Where garlands of red roses were.

Without, the world is cold and white;  
Birds are struck dumb with frost, alas!  
An old crone crying in the night  
Walks by the streams locked up in glass;  
There is no colour in the grass.

Within, the houses, great and small,  
Are warm with fires and loud with laughter  
Red holly queens it in the hall  
And ivy-trails link beam and rafter:  
Men feast, nor look before nor after.

Girls, glancing out at whirling snow,  
Their lovers meet with brighter eyes;  
Light laughter flickers to and fro,  
And ne'er a one its right denies  
Unto the Druid mistletoe.

Kisses and laughter, here's the end;  
A wiser end could scarcely be.  
You were our lover and our friend,  
Old Year, and so the world and we  
Throw kisses to you as you wend  
Your way and speed you merrily.

NORA CHESON.





## A SHUFFLING OF BEDROOMS.

By HAROLD BEGBIE.

Illustrated by G. L. STAMPA.

MRS. LUCAS was sitting by the dressing-table of her mother, Mrs. Parkinson, while the venerable old lady took off her widow's cap, loosened the strings of her dress, and warmed a flannel night-dress at the fire. At the doorway of another bedroom in the Rectory, Mr. Lucas stood bidding good-night to his uncle, General Skinner, while that lusty old warrior shuffled as well as the gout would allow him towards the fireplace. "Good-night to you," growled the old General, "and pleasant dreams."

"Thank you, I'm sure!" replied Mr. Lucas, and, with one of his little, nervous smiles, he drew the door noiselessly to, removed his hand with the greatest care from the handle, and on the tips of his ten nervous toes stole silently down to his study.

Arrived in that dull room, the Rector's eyes first sought the whisky-decanter to which General Skinner had been paying earnest attention ; then, turning his gaze to the lamp, he lowered the flame a little, and, after that, with a pair of tongs he removed two or three of the least-burnt coals from the fire and left them to smoke in the fender. He poured himself out a glass of hot water, drew his chair to the remains of the fire, and, with his handkerchief wound about the steaming tumbler, began to sip the hot water.

It was expensive work entertaining guests, and though he was very fond of old Mrs. Parkinson, and though he could put up with General Skinner, whose will was a matter of much cogitation to the Rector, Mr. Lucas felt that, on the whole, it was a good thing visitors came so seldom to his unsophisticated Devonshire village. He was in the midst of some such reflections as this when a knock on the floor above him, the usual summons, told him that it was time to come to bed. He set down his glass, stuffed the handkerchief in his pocket, and then examined the bolts of the window. He put a fire-guard very carefully over the almost-dead fire, and, with the lamp in his hand, went out of the room on his tour of inspection. He tried every window-latch, locked every door, and examined every cupboard on the ground-floor; he then turned out the hall-lamp with great care, lighted a candle, and blew the flame from the lamp he had been carrying in his hand. With one final examination of the front-door, with its manifold bolts and chains and locks, the nervous Rector, candle in hand, mounted the stairs and crept silently to bed.

It was some minutes after the church clock had boomed out the

very witching hour of midnight that the Rector was aroused from his sleep and sat up with a jump by the side of his gasping wife.

"What is it?" he cried.

"Listen!" she whispered.

At first, the Rector could hear nothing save the beating of his own heart, which was loud enough to drown the thumping of his wife's; but, presently, the noise of shuffling footsteps in the passage outside reached his ice-cold ears and struck pricking terror into every vein and artery of his quaking body.

"There's someone in the house!" gasped Mrs. Lucas.

The Rector could make no reply.

"Did you lock the door?" she asked.

He nodded in the darkness.

"Did you lock the door?" she repeated.

"Yes!" he burst out, panting very hard. The utterance almost choked him.

Mrs Lucas put out her hand for the matches.

"Ugh! What's that?" cried the Rector, hoarsely, crouching down in the bed.

"Sh-h-h! It's only me. I'm going to strike a light."

Then in the silence that followed a rustle was heard at the door. The two terrified mortals gazed out of staring eyes in that direction. Their hearts jumped and bumped in awful unison. Then, *the handle of the door turned with a slow, creaking sound.*

The rector ducked his head under the bed-clothes. His wife followed him.

"William," she whispered, "you must go for the constable!"

"I should be murdered!" he protested.

"You must!"

"Better they should steal everything than that I should be killed. I am your only means of support. You have no one but me to look to."

"They might kill Mamma!"

"Do you think there is more than one of them?" he gasped.

"Yes, I heard someone downstairs and someone upstairs, both at the same time."

"We cannot possibly do anything!" he panted.

"Yes, you can get out of the window—they won't hear you; then you can run round and wake Wilkinson." Wilkinson was the policeman.

"There's sure to be one of them in the garden!" he cried, in an agony. "They always have someone to keep guard outside. It's madness to think about it! Besides, I should be leaving you alone, all by yourself."

"You must risk it."

"Emily, it is most dangerous!" he cried. "Consider my responsibility towards you!"

The Rector lay there, crouched up in terror; his wife slipped out of bed, went to the window, noiselessly pulled up the blind, and looked out.

*The handle of the door was tried again; this time it rattled.*

"There's no one there, and it's quite dark," she whispered from the window.

"They've tried the door again!" he gasped. "Emily, we had much better lie quiet and wait till they've gone. It's tempting Providence to move from our bed. Let us have faith that they won't steal the silver."



"They'll murder Mamma! She always sleeps with the door open. If they kill her you will never forgive yourself!"

"Shall I shout for Uncle Stephen?"

"No; that would kill Mamma with fright! You must go for Wilkinson. William, you really must! Be a man—you must go for Wilkinson!"

"How can I get out of the window?" he protested.

"I'll tie the sheets together. There's a flower-bed underneath; you won't hurt yourself even if the sheets give way."

Again and again he raised objections, but in the end he found himself standing out of bed in his night-shirt, helping his more vigorous wife to tie the two sheets together. When this difficult task was accomplished, and just as he was about to make the journey to his dressing-room for trousers, the handle of the door turned again, the door was pushed, and the sound of a muffled human voice reached them from the corridor.

"Don't delay!" gasped the wife, opening the casement, and tying one end of the knotted sheets round the leg of her dressing-table. "Never mind about putting on any clothes. Run round as quick as you can and wake Wilkinson. I'll barricade the door while you're away."

The Rector was rather glad that he had not to go into his dressing-room, for opening even an interior door in his present mood suggested all sorts of terrors to him. So he went to the window, and, after protesting that the sheets wouldn't hold and that he was certain to be murdered, he put one leg out into the darkness and the cold.

"It's raining!" he cried, his teeth chattering. "I shall catch my death of cold!"

"That's better than being murdered in your bed!" cried Mrs. Lucas, a little illogically, and then, going to the bed, she returned hastily with a pair of woollen slippers. "Put these on, and go quickly. Don't wait a minute!"

The poor Rector, long used to meek obedience, pulled the slippers over his feet, seized the sheets despairingly in his two hands, and then put one leg over the window-sill. The noise at the door, repeated again with alarming lack of concealment, sent the other leg flying out of the window, and in the next minute the Rector was dangling from the sheets, his eyes turned despairingly up to his wife's, while his poor shins grated painfully against the flint wall. The wind whipped the night-shirt about his loins, and the rain drenched him even as he hung there. Gasping with fear of his perilous position, he began to descend. He slid down awkwardly, knowing nothing of rope-climbing; in sudden and spasmodic jerks he went down, putting a tremendous strain upon the sheets, and peeling his legs at each descent. Down—jerk; down—jerk; down—jerk. He could hear the dressing-table creaking under the strain.

In the middle of one of these abrupt slides, he came with nerve-shattering suddenness into the midst of a holly-bush, and, the first prickle loosing his hands from the sheets, he fell headlong into what seemed to his distorted imagination like an elephantine hedgehog. Through the spikes of this awful creature the unfortunate Rector rolled his helpless way, until he found himself, torn and bleeding, lying in the comfortable slop of the flower-bed. Fearful that the noise of his fall would rouse the burglars, he lay there for some little time, nearly dying of apoplexy in the vain attempt of holding his now stertorous breath. But the cruellest stroke came from above, when his wife, thrusting her head out into the rain, whispered down through the darkness, "Well done! Be quick, now. I'll barricade the door." And, with that, she pulled up the sheets and lowered the blind.

Feeling like a man deserted by all his friends, the unhappy Rector picked himself up, muffled his groans of sore physical anguish, and

walking on tiptoe, lest his slippered feet should alarm the burglarious gang, stole out from the shadow of the flower-bed into the glow of the garden. It was very dark; the trees were in commotion and the rain splashed into his face; there was nothing to be seen in the garden, not even his way, and the Rector went blundering through herbaceous borders and "carpet"-beds in his efforts to reach the drive-gate surreptitiously. At last he found it, but here fresh disaster awaited him, for, fearing to draw attention to himself by the click of the gate, he determined to climb over it, and in climbing over it (the top bar was as slippery as ice) he went slithering over on the other side, his feet in the air, and landed in the muddy road on his back. The noise of his fall roused him to action, and, gathering himself up, he tore up the village street as fast as his little, thin legs could carry him. It was rather a nasty tumble, and the Rector felt sick; his head began to swim, blood flowed from his nose, he grew suddenly desperate. Lurching on, he cried hoarsely and tremblingly for help, and ere he reached Wilkinson's cottage more than one window was opened and more than a dozen heads looked out at the strange spectacle. Then Wilkinson took some time to wake up, and, while the Rector in his night-shirt stood shivering and gasping outside the constabulary station (where the solitary street-lamp burned with singular brightness), the rest of the village gazed at him from their windows with paralysing

enthusiasm. This enthusiasm kept them there whispering and gaping till the constable appeared, but after that windows were shut and half the village turned out into the street. After much talk and questioning, the crowd moved off in the direction of the Rectory. It was a strange procession. At the head resolutely marched the constable with drawn bâton, by his side gingerly trotted the Rector holding down the ends of his night-gown, and on every side and following close behind came labourers and boys clattering down the streaming road with noisy, unlaced boots, and armed with every variety of stick and fire-iron. In this manner they reached the scene of the burglary, and Wilkinson made his dispositions.

A ring was thrown round the Rectory, and the constable, with four picked men, followed the Rector into the wind-blown garden. They beat the shrubberies with great care, and, under the riotous trees, slowly approached the house, each man glaring through the darkness, as well as the pitiless rain would let him, for the gang of desperate burglars. A cry from one of the



*He fell headlong into what seemed to his distorted imagination like an elephantine hedgehog.*

men, who thought he had caught a burglar when he had only flung his arms round a young and vigorous monkey-puzzler set the Rectory mastiff a-barking, and soon every dog and puppy in the village was growling and howling in resonant sympathy. Such a din had never before been heard in that quiet quarter of the world, for the dogs barked with fair vigour by themselves, but when the hounds in the park kennels gave tongue they simply roared. It was like a menagerie at feeding-time. Worse was to follow, for some of the village curs, breaking loose and finding their way to the crowd of men gathered about the Rectory, suddenly made up their minds, or their instincts, with one accord that the person in night-shirt, with bare legs, from which the blood still trickled, was the wicked cause of all this stir and stress, and therefore, with one accord, they went for him. Poor Mr. Lucas flew hither and thither, and the burglar was forgotten by the crowd in the pressing necessity of saving their parson from destruction. The darkness rendered this task as hazardous as the catching of the burglars, and the unlucky clergyman found himself belaboured by the clubs or sticks of those who were most anxious to rescue him from bodily harm.

When the last dog had been flogged out of the Rectory garden the clock had struck one, and the servants of the Rectory were



standing at the open door ready to receive their stricken master. He was carried, groaning and fainting, to his bedroom, and Mrs. Lucas, in dressing-gown and slippers, was left to discuss matters with the constable.

Every door and every window was examined with bucolic thoroughness, and every door and every window was found to be untouched of burglars. With consideration for the old people, her mother and her husband's uncle, who were fortunately still sleeping soundly, Mrs. Lucas went on tiptoe from room to room on the ground-floor in company with the constable, and, finally, had to admit in a whisper that there was no burglar on the premises. Wilkinson, in a whisper, hinted that it must have been fancy, but promised to look round early in the morning in case of developments.

Now it was in the morning that developments manifested themselves, developments that even Wilkinson was powerless to cope with. And it is with these extraordinary developments, rather than with the parson's midnight escapade, that this faithful history concerns itself—developments of so staggering and dreadful a nature that the imagination boggles at belief in them.

The Rector being too ill to leave his bed, Mrs. Lucas went down to breakfast alone. Passing down the corridor, she was surprised to see the General's shaving-water standing outside his door; but when she arrived at the dining-room and found that her mother—an unusually early riser even among old folk—was not down before her, she became suddenly aware that something really had happened in the night. She rang the bell and summoned the maid whose duty it was to look after Mrs. Parkinson.

"Is my mother getting up, Mary?" she asked.

"I don't know, Ma'am," answered the maid, "for, when I entered the room with hot water this morning, she had got the clothes pulled over her head, and when I drew up the blinds and set the tea at her side, and remarked it was a nice morning after the storm, the old lady did nothing but kick with her legs under the clothes as though she were took with St. Vitus' Dance."

"Good Heavens!" cried Mrs. Lucas, starting.

"When I went to the General's room, I found the door locked, and so I just set his shaving-water at the door and took the tea-things down again."

Mrs. Lucas grew very white. "Supposing if the burglars have murdered them!" she said.

"They haven't murdered the old lady, Ma'am!" answered the girl, with assurance. "She kicked under the clothes like a young thing of two-and-twenty. Lor', I never see anything like it! The more I spoke, the more she kicked. If I hadn't made the bed myself, I should have expected to see the clothes kicked right up to the ceiling. There isn't no 'murdered' about her, not a ha'pp'orth!"

"I must go and see what has happened. Come with me, Mary."

Mrs. Lucas, followed by the faithful maid, went upstairs and tapped at her mother's door. There was no answer. She opened the door slowly and peeped in.

"Mamma!" she called, softly. "Mamma! It's nearly half-past nine."

The bundle under the bed-clothes began to kick and to gurgle with a vigour that nearly frightened Mrs. Lucas out of her senses. As it was, these extraordinary antics were sufficient to drive her back towards the door, where she stood with the maid, staring helplessly towards the agitated bed.

"Mamma, dear Mamma!" cried the Rector's wife.

More vigorous kicking.

"Mrs. Parkinson, Ma'am!" called the servant. "It's time to get up. The breakfast will all be cold. Hain't you no wish, Ma'am, for a little egg-and-bacon and a nice hot cup-o' coffee?"

The kicking grew more violent.

"Mamma, dear!" cried Mrs. Lucas. "Aren't you well, love? Has anything happened to you?"

"She've drunk her tea and eaten her bread-and-butter," commented the servant.

Mrs. Lucas, summoning up all her courage, moved to the bed. "Mother, darling," she cooed, softly, stooping her head almost to the



The crowd moved off in the direction of the Rectory. It was a strange procession.



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Benjamin Blood was a man of his word,  
A man of his word was he;  
And he swore an oath, one day, on his ship,  
That the coastguard's daughter, Marjorie Skipp,  
His wedded wife should be.



For Marjorie Skipp had scorned his love  
And bade him sail away,  
And she heeded the pleadings of Willie Trevan,  
Who was only a hard-working, seafaring man  
That had wooed her for many a day.

Black was the heart of Smuggler Blood  
And foul the scheme he laid,  
For he vowed, by all the gods above,  
To cheat Trevan of Marjorie's love  
By carrying off the maid.

So he sent a message to Marjorie Skipp  
That Willie Trevan would wait  
On the Guernard's Head, one night at ten;  
And he ambushed there, with three of his men,  
To carry the maid to her fate.

Shone the moon with its silvery eye,  
When it pierced the scudding clouds,  
And lit up the coast till it might have been day,  
While the smuggler's ship stood out in the bay  
With a signal-light up in the shrouds.

But Marjorie, bent on the lover's tryst,  
Without any thought of foul play,  
Trod the path to the beetling cliff,  
Her head erect and her figure stiff,  
Till she came in sight of the bay.

Then the ship, with its light, burst full on her view.  
For the sky at that moment was clear,  
Just as four dark figures sprang to their feet,  
Behind and around, cutting off her retreat,  
And she screamed with the sudden fear.



Over the rocks flew Marjorie Skipp,  
With Smuggler Blood behind,  
And she climbed right round the rocky head,  
Till her clothes were torn and her fingers bled,  
And her hair streamed out in the wind.



On the seaward side of the Guernard's Head--  
 You can see the place well by day--  
 Is a ledge of rock some two feet wide  
 That looks right down on the seething tide.  
 Here Marjorie turned to bay.



With a roar of triumph  
 came Benjamin Blood  
 And clambered on to  
 the ledge;  
 But, ere he could seize his  
 prey by the wrist,  
 She eluded his grasp, with  
 a spring and a twist,  
 And pushed him over  
 the edge.

Now, ten yards down the  
 rugged cliff  
 Is a forest of prickly  
 gorse,  
 And on to this soft and  
 downy bed,  
 With his heels where he  
 usually carried his  
 head,  
 He alighted with all his  
 force.



Scratched was the face of the smuggler bold,  
 Till he looked a ghastly sight;  
 And never before had Benjamin Blood,  
 Whose name was feared by land and flood,  
 Been in such a ridiculous plight.

But Marjorie laughed a merry laugh,  
 And went on her homeward way.  
 Through the whole of Cornwall the tale was known  
 And the smuggler lets women severely alone,  
 For he carries the scars to this day.

THE END.





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## THE BUSKERS.

By KEBLE HOWARD.

Illustrated by DUDLEY HARDY.

### I.

NOW that it is all over, now that we have lived down the ignominy of the affair, I cannot help admitting that the greater part of the blame must be laid at the door of Butcher-Brown. You see, my friend had had experience of busking. He said so. Great Heavens, he boasted of it! Over and over again he had told me how he once spent six weeks in a small seaside town, blacked his face every day, and never made less than ten pounds a-week.

He declared that there were five of them, and that they spent the jolliest time imaginable. All the women, it seemed, fell in love with them; all the men showered gold upon them. They called themselves "The Black Star Minstrels," or something equally vulgar, and the railway people ran local specials as a testimony to their fascination. Like the fool that I was, I believed Butcher-Brown. I listened to his tales with round eyes and dilated ears. Finally, nothing would satisfy me but that I, too, should go a-busking. And with Butcher-Brown.

Allow me, however, to be strictly just in this matter. Undoubtedly, my friend was handicapped by circumstances. In the first place, it was quite impossible for us to "work" any seaside town. Butcher-Brown's people, with whom I was staying, lived in a dead-alive Midland county. It was one of those languid, sparsely populated counties wherein nobody did anything in particular, but everybody took an intense interest in his neighbour's idleness. Butcher-Brown's people were perfectly well known. They had lived in the same house for years

and years, and had won for themselves all the respect that accrues to those whose virtues are rather negative than aggressive.

It was also out of the question, therefore, that we should attempt to busk within twenty miles of Butcher-Brown's home. We discussed the question for three days, and then, setting aside several flippant suggestions on the part of Butcher-Brown's brothers and sisters, finally decided on a small town that I will call Wedborough Stones. We found it on the county map. Butcher-Brown declared that it was the very place. He said that he had been there once, in a private capacity, and had always kept it in his mind for busking purposes. I asked him why he hadn't mentioned the place before, but my question remained unanswered.

Before we go any further, I think I had better describe my friend Butcher-Brown. He was a well-set-up young man, with crisply curling hair and an impressive voice. As an amateur actor, he was the most persistent juvenile lead I have ever seen. Over and over again I have seen him play quite thankless parts with the greatest enjoyment. He seemed more than content to be made a fool of throughout three Acts if only he might kiss the leading lady as the final curtain fell. Such enthusiasm in an amateur is the more refreshing for the reason that the average person of that kind is never happy except when raising a guffaw. For the rest, I ought to state that Butcher-Brown was a devil of a fellow and sang Hayden Coffin's songs.



Having decided on Wedborough Stones as our hunting-ground, we next turned to the arrangement of the programme. My friend, as I have said, confined himself to ballads of the semi-impassioned order, whilst I, for my part, hovered between the compositions of Albert Chevalier and Corney Grain. So far, so middling. Our chief anxiety was to secure an accompanist sufficiently brazen to busk and sufficiently rash to accompany Butcher-Brown and myself.



*Blacked his face every day.*

furnished with the address of one Scallop, who was admittedly the finest performer on the "jigger" that had as yet been born into the stagnant life of the county.

With a view to dispensing with the inconvenience of a glossary, perhaps I may be allowed to explain that a jigger is a small harmonium. In its portable form, it resembles an oblong box of somewhat sinister shape. A skilful player, such as Scallop, will extract some very telling sounds from a jigger. Even as I write I can hear the strains of "The Washington Post" screeching through the usually peaceful air of Wedborough Stones, and can see poor Scallop's tired feet pushing and kicking at the stiff pedals.

The finding of Scallop, even after the careful instructions of the music-seller, was a tedious business. He was one of those men who take a fiendish delight in burying themselves in a little wilderness of jerry-built cottages. Apart from the numbers, there was nothing to distinguish one house from another, with the exception of an

At the suggestion of Butcher-Brown's youngest sister, we paid a visit to the local music-shop and asked the gentleman behind the counter whether he could recommend a person of a musical turn of mind who would not be unwilling to exploit his talents in the main-street of Wedborough Stones. The gentleman behind the counter, naturally enough, scratched his head. Under the circumstances, any respectable music-seller might be excused for employing so obvious an aid to thought. In this particular case, moreover, the end justified the means, for we were presently

occasional geranium or an isolated lace curtain. Scallop's house was one with a geranium.

As for the musician himself, his chief characteristic was the absence of any distinctive attribute. He was small of feature and small of limb. His eyes were colourless, his hair short and straight, his nose insignificant. His mouth was a straight line. He wore a dingy black coat and a sad pair of trousers. His home was a bed-sitting-room at the back of the house, and his window looked out on to a few square yards of stamped mud. There were no pictures on his walls. His floor was uncarpeted. The only visible sign of luxury was a copy of *Til-Bits*. I afterwards learnt, quite accidentally, that Scallop went in for competitions. I was not surprised.

He received our proposition with perfect equanimity, merely stipulating that he should be paid a fixed sum, irrespective of profits, and should be allowed an opportunity of trying over the songs before we started operations. We agreed, therefore, to pay him five shillings in addition to his expenses, and asked him to step round that same afternoon with a view to rehearsing the programme.

The rehearsal, I frankly admit, was not a success. For my own part, I was in favour of holding it indoors, but Butcher-Brown scoffed at such a notion.

"We are going to perform in the open air," he said, pompously, "and we must rehearse in the open air. If Mr. Scallop will be good enough to give me a hand with the jigger, we will take it down the garden."

"I hope you won't annoy the neighbours, dear," said Mrs. Butcher-Brown, gently.

My friend cast one glance of sorrowful rebuke in the direction of his mother; then, without a word, he picked up the jigger and staggered out into the garden. Scallop, after some slight hesitation, followed Butcher-Brown, and I followed Scallop. I was a little pained to find that Butcher-Brown's sisters were following me, and I made haste to assume a casual, slightly bored air. I desired them to believe that it was nothing out of the common, so far as I was concerned, to sing comic songs in a back-garden to the accompaniment of a harmonium.

The reader, I am sure, will spare me the pain of entering fully into the details of the rehearsal. It will be sufficient to say that Butcher-Brown, quite justifiably, lost his temper and boxed three of his sisters' ears. It is always a terrible thing for me to stand by and see a woman suffer, but I am bound to confess that I silently supported my friend in the extreme measures that he found it necessary to adopt.

After his weeping relatives had disappeared in the direction of the house, I assisted Butcher-Brown to inflict sudden and unexpected pain upon two small boys who had taken up a strategic position on the other side of the fence. Scallop, with imperturbable gravity, continued to play the jigger.

"And when," said the little accompanist, as we straightened our ties, "would you be wanting to perform?"

Butcher-Brown looked at me. I returned his glance with an unflinching eye.

"To-night," said my friend, in a firm voice.

"To-night," I echoed.

"Then I'll just 'ave a bit o' something to eat and come straight back," said Scallop.

He shuffled off.



*The gentleman behind the counter.*



*If only he might kiss the leading lady as the final curtain fell.*



*Scallop.*

## II.

The evening breeze blew keenly as we stepped out of the train at Wedborough. The day had been a fine one, but towards six o'clock the wind veered round to the north-east and made poor little Scallop shiver beneath his worn garments. I, too, was shivering, and that despite the fact that I was wearing a heavy ulster that reached nearly to my feet. Butcher-Brown, with the callousness of the old hand, accused me of nervousness. I admitted the justice of the charge, but deplored his lack of taste in making it at such a moment.

Wedborough Stones was distant from Wedborough Station some two and a-half miles. Our limited means scarcely justified a conveyance; besides, we were determined to keep up a professional appearance. My friend impressed upon me that, whatever happened, I must be careful not to give away the fact that we were out for our amusement. I shivered again, and promised him that I wouldn't.

We had also agreed to adopt, as far as possible, the professional twang and phraseology. Butcher-Brown rather prided himself on his busking slang, and had given me a few lessons in the art before we

the village-inn and demanded three "bitters." I loathe beer, but thought it best to swallow the stuff and say nothing. Whilst the landlady was executing the order, we made our way into the parlour and proceeded to effect some slight changes in our costumes. Butcher-Brown blackened his eyebrows, put on a false moustache, and removed his collar. I, in my turn, changed my cloth cap for a gaudy Tam-o'-Shanter, and knotted a large red scarf about my neck. The result was not pleasing, but my friend insisted that I must look funny. He even offered to redden the tip of my nose a little, but I refused, resolutely, to submit to anything of the kind.

We drank our beer—I lingered somewhat unduly over my share—and then emerged into the evening light and took up a position on the village-green. I can honestly assure you that never in my life have I felt such an abject fool as at that moment. A small crowd of village children collected round us, together with a few labourers and one or two women carrying babies.

Instructed by my friend, Scallop opened his jigger and began to play, in a rather down-hearted manner, "The Washington Post."



*I assisted Butcher-Brown to inflict sudden and unexpected pain upon two small boys.*

left home. As for Scallop, we decided that he must talk often and talk loudly. I need hardly say that he did nothing of the kind.

As the train steamed away into the distance, Butcher-Brown swung out of the station and started off in the direction of Wedborough Stones. Scallop and I, carrying the jigger between us, meekly followed. The instrument was no light weight, but by wrapping our handkerchiefs round the sharp handles and changing hands at frequent intervals we managed to get along fairly well. My friend, in the meantime, scanned every house and cottage that we passed with the true professional eye. He explained to me, with a somewhat prodigal use of expletives, that he was keeping a look-out for a likely pitch. I said nothing, but I caught myself fervently praying that he would not find one.

Having toiled along for about a mile, we came to a small village. Butcher-Brown, with an air of determination that sent a creepy feeling all down my spine, gave us to understand that we were to start operations on the village-green.

"Don't you think," I suggested, hesitatingly, "that this place is rather too small?"

But Butcher-Brown vouchsafed no reply. With the air of one accustomed to battle with the world and come off best, he strode into

Whilst this entertainment was going forward, Butcher-Brown lit a cigarette and endeavoured to put himself on a friendly footing with the crowd by levelling at them certain remarks bearing upon their personal appearance. As these witticisms were received with a discouraging silence, my friend presently relapsed into a fit of gloomy meditation. For myself, I endeavoured to look as though I had nothing whatever to do with the show.

At last, Scallop finished "The Washington Post" with a prolonged wail, and Butcher-Brown announced to the yokels that he would favour them with a rendering of "The Soldiers of the Queen." At this point, a man at the back laughed a little, and one of the girls invited us, generally, to chase her; my friend, however, nothing daunted, got to work on the song and sang it all through. Then, with a word to me to turn on something funny, he took off his hat and began to carry it round.

Now, to do myself justice, I am not at all a bad hand at comic songs. It is one thing, however, to step up on to a platform in evening-dress, and another to bellow at yokels from the centre of a village-green. I did my best to make them laugh. I even condescended to make faces between the verses, but nobody, I regret to say, seemed at all amused. On the contrary, a baby began to cry bitterly, and



the mother, rocking it to and fro, entreated the infant not to be frightened of the ugly man.

I cut the last verse, and Butcher-Brown, returning suddenly, ordered us to pack up the jigger and move off again towards Wedborough Stones. We afterwards learnt that he had collected sixpence-halfpenny and been grossly insulted by an old gentleman on horseback.

The exact state of my friend's feelings at this juncture of the proceedings I could only guess. For my own part, however, I was heartily disgusted with the affair. The wind grew colder and colder; the jigger grew heavier and heavier; at every step the country appeared more desolate. Worst of all, I felt that we should have to go home confessing failure, and I could already hear the scathing remarks of the three Miss Butcher-Browns who had had their ears boxed.



*Grossly insulted by an old gentleman on horseback.*

However, we plodded on, and, after walking until the jigger weighed a ton and the white road became a nightmare, we eventually found ourselves at Wedborough Stones.

As we entered the town, we met a man in a dog-cart, with whom Butcher-Brown exchanged greetings.

"A nice night!" cried my friend, cheerily

"Ah, if it don't rain!" bellowed the man.

"Any people about?" queried my friend.

"One or two," was the answer.

"We're goin' to learn 'em a bit of a tune," returned Butcher-Brown.

"You'd best not waste your time," said the man, and he went on his way with shoulders hunched.



*Lurched across in our direction.*

We crawled up the street and came to the Market-place.

"Here we are!" said my friend. "Same programme, but buck up a bit, both of you."

Once again, then, poor little Scallop arranged his jigger, sat down on the camp-stool, and tried to fire the blood of three small boys, two hobbledeioy girls, and the village policeman. Butcher-Brown,



*Scallop and I, carrying the jigger between us, meekly followed.*



in the meantime, strove to appear important by busying himself with the bundle of music that we had brought. And I, horribly conscious of my 'Tam-o'-Shanter and my flaring scarf, stood on one foot and gazed intently at the church-clock.

My friend's rendering of "The Soldiers of the Queen" went rather better than on the previous occasion. Two men, indeed, came



*The local policeman threw out his chest.*

out of a public-house and lurched across in our direction, whilst the local policeman threw out his chest and told the three small boys to stand back. I suppose he meant well, but I would much rather have seen them draw a little nearer. The light, you see, had almost gone by this time, and I was depending upon my facial contortions to carry my number through with a dash.

At the conclusion of his effort, Butcher-Brown, as before, went round with the hat and left me to amuse the audience. Determined to win success, I started by deliberately winking at the elder of the two

hobbledehoy girls. My experience of village concerts went to prove that that sort of thing, although slightly vulgar, pleases the section of the audience that supplies the applause at the close. You may imagine my surprise, then, when the girl—throwing at me the words "Cheeky beast!"—flounced away from the little ring of listeners and took her friend with her.

Nor did the affair end there, for a powerful looking youth, detaching himself from the audience, lurched to within a foot of my nose, and demanded an immediate explanation of my conduct. My first instinct was to go on with my funny song as though nothing had happened. A certain look in the eye of the young fellow, however, persuaded me that my best plan would be to treat the matter as a joke.

"Pretty girl," said I, trying my hardest to speak jovially.

"You mind your own business," was the surly answer.

"Certainly," I rejoined; "let me sing you another song."

"I shall sing you a song," returned the yokel, heavily, "unless you mind your own business."

"That's right!" I exclaimed, edging away a little; "give us one of your own songs! My friend here will play for you."

The lout stepped forward. "Hold your noise!" he commanded.

I held it.

"D'ye hear?" he continued, aggressively.

At this point, as luck would have it, the constable interfered.

"You'd best be off," he hinted, tapping me on the shoulder and interposing his enormous body between me and my tormentor.

"I quite agree with you, constable," I said.

"Very well, then," said the constable; "off yer pop, and not so much of your lip."

It occurred to me, in a vague sort of way, that the people of that district had a strong dislike to conversation of any kind, but I was too busy helping Scallop to pack up the jigger to comment upon the point.

Just as we were ready to start, Butcher-Brown returned.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"Never mind," I said, hastily, keeping one eye on the lout and the other on the constable. "I'll explain to you later."

Followed by the aggressive yokel and two or three of his friends, we set out for Wedborough Station. When, at length, our enemies dropped behind, I gave my friend an account of the trouble.

"Gad," he exclaimed, "I wish I'd been there! I'd have given the fellow a thrashing!"

"Fortunately for yourself," I replied, "you were more profitably employed. How much did you collect?"

"Twopence," was the answer.

It was after twelve o'clock when we arrived home. We had just missed a train at Wedborough, and found ourselves obliged to wait two hours.

As I had anticipated, Butcher-Brown's three sisters were waiting up for us.

"Well," they exclaimed in chorus, "how did you get on?"

"Oh, all right!" said my friend, carelessly. "Wedborough Stones is not a very good place for busking."

The girls exchanged glances, and then, without another word, they bustled about and got us some supper. This done, they kissed their brother, shook me by the hand, and went upstairs to bed.

"You're evidently forgiven," said I, rather touched.

"Yes," replied Butcher-Brown, placidly cutting himself another slice of cold beef; "they won't interrupt any more of our rehearsals."

"They certainly will not," I agreed, speaking with conviction.



*"I shall sing you a song," returned the yokel, heavily.*





*"There 'e was, Sir, sittin' crouched up agenst the wall, with his eyes wide open, lookin' at me."*

*"THE HAUNTED HANSOM." (SEE PAGE 19.)*



Illustrated by JOHN HASSALL.

"YES, sir, I will, thank you." The cabman got down from his box and stood at the bottom of the steps while I fumbled with my latch-key. It was a bitterly cold night and he had driven me from town. I had lost my last train—a habit of mine in my bachelor days—and, before sending the man back, I proposed to cheer him with a stiff glass of my father's whisky. It took some time to open the door, as my hands were half-frozen. When I did, the glow from the dining-room fire threw a cheerful and inviting light across the hall. I asked the man in and got out the whisky, producing at the same time a box of cigars.

"You'll have a beastly cold drive back, I'm afraid."

"Oh, that's nothin', sir! We're used to that. 'Ere's to your very good 'ealth, sir."

I nodded, acknowledging the compliment.

He paused, with the glass raised to his lips and his gaze riveted on a date-stand marking February the 12th, which stood on my father's desk in the window.

"Beggin' your pardon, sir, but is that date right?"

I was not sure myself, so I took out an evening paper which I had rammed into my pocket.

"Yes, that's right. Why?"

"Strange, sir! It's many a year since I've passed this day without takin' particular notice."

"Why, what is it—your birthday?"

"No, sir; nor yet my weddin'-day. But, all the same, it's a day I've never forgotten till now." His face, which had beamed over the cheering glass, grew serious. After a pause, he added: "And it won't make my journey back to town any the more cheerful. Well, sir, it's not a long story, if you'd like to 'ear it—but it's a true one."

I had become quite cheered and warm, and was in no hurry to turn the poor devil out into the night.

"Why, what is the story?"

"Well, sir, it was about the time when people first took to ridin' bicycles—I mean, the new kind. We cabmen was all agenst them, for wot with people who didn't know 'ow to ride, people as was learnin' to ride, and them as rode too fast, our nerves was goin' all to pieces. Why, sir, at one time I used to get so many frights that I almost thought of chuckin' up the job. However, that's all over now, and, wot with the motors and all these new-fangled ways of gettin' about, it seems as if it's the 'orses as'll 'ave to go. And just to think of the fuss that was made about a few bicycles!"

He moistened his throat and continued: "I was drivin' a nice cab at the time. It was quite new, and the mare—well, people used to look round and wonder wot she was doin' in a 'ansom-cab. I was doin' a rare trade, and the rows I've 'ad with my mates because gents would 'ave me whether they were the first up or no—well, you wouldn't believe. 'Owever, one night—as I told you, sir, it was February the 12th—I was drivin' 'ome down Westminster way, when a gent 'ailed me near the Abbey. He'd missed his train and wanted me to drive 'im out beyond Highgate. It was miles outside the radius, and at first I refused, straight. But, somehow, 'e was that earnest, and there wasn't no other cab about, and 'is terms were that liberal that I told 'im to jump in. It began to rain when we reached the Tottenham Court Road by the 'Orseshoe, and I'd 'alf a mind to turn 'im out—but there were too many coppers about, and 'e might have turned nasty. Lord, sir, you'd be surprised 'ow gents can forget theirselves with cabmen!"

Here he allowed his hand to fall carelessly on his empty glass, and, anxious not to come under the category of "gents that forget theirselves," I filled up again.

"Would you mind, sir, if I took one or two of them lumps of sugar out to my 'orse? He'll take it as an attention, and I can 'ear 'im gettin' a bit restless."

I put the sugar in his hand, and he went out and bribed the horse to settle down.

"It was a long drive," he continued, when he re-entered, "and I went down and up lanes as I'd never been near before, wonderin' 'ow the deuce I was goin' to find my way out agen. At last we reached a high garden-wall—there wasn't any 'ouse to be seen—and 'e let 'imself in. 'E didn't give me nothin' to drink, but 'e put a sovereign in my 'and and said 'Good-night.'"

"I turned an' started for 'ome, and then I got clean out of my reckoning, and went drivin' up and down and round about till I fairly lost my temper. There wasn't a copper to be seen. At last I found myself in a long, narrow road, with just the same 'igh garden-walls as the gent I'd driven 'ad gone through; so I started down it, thinkin' the other end might lead to some part I knew. Suddenly I saw comin' along in the distance the lamp of a bicycle. I thought it rather peculiar—a bicycle in that place at that time of night. You see, sir, there weren't so many of them then. It was comin' at a stunning pace, too. As 'e got near, 'e rang his bell. Lord, sir, I can 'ear the sound now—a nasty, tinkly little sound it 'ad. They usen't to make 'em like they do now. I suppose, for the moment, 'e thought 'e was on the right side of the road. At any rate, I swerved a bit—just enough to save my 'orse. He caught my near wheel, and the next moment I 'eard a nasty thud. My mare, naterally, was frightened and tried to bolt, but I pulled 'er up after a few yards and looked round. I couldn't see nothin'. Well, I just let go some bad language and was goin' to drive on, thinking as 'e'd ridden off, when it suddenly struck me 'e might be 'urt. There wasn't much room, but I got my mare round and went back.

"Before I knew where I was, I was on top of 'im. He was lyin' all huddled up close to the wall. I 'ollered out to ask 'im if 'e was 'urt, but he never answered. 'E was as still as a corpse. My 'eart fairly jumped into my mouth, and I got down off my box and unhitched one of my lamps—for his 'ad gone out, wherever it was.

"If you'll believe me, sir, 'e was dead—stone-dead."

The cabby pulled out a big, coloured handkerchief and wiped his forehead. The recollection had made him turn quite pale.

"There 'e was, sir, sittin' crouched up agenst the wall, with his eyes wide open, lookin' at me. The blood was comin' from a wound on his head.

"At first I wouldn't believe it, but when I grasped the truth I felt awful.

"The rain 'ad turned to a nasty sort of sleet. As far as I knew, there wasn't a soul that I could get at. I walked up and down, 'ammering at the doors in the wall, wherever I could find one. And for one mortal hour I was alone with that dead man, sir.

"I got so creepy that I daren't turn my back on 'im.

"Jest as I was goin' to leave 'im alone and go for 'elp, I saw a light at the other end of the lane, in the direction from which I 'ad come. I 'ollered for my life, and in a minute a p'liceman came runnin' up.



"I told 'im wot 'ad 'appened, and 'e threw 'is light on the face of the man. Some'ow, I 'adnt 'ad the pluck to 'ave a good look at 'im.

"'He's dead cabby,' he said.

"I felt inclined to answer that I could 'ave told 'im that, but, some'ow, I didn't feel myself, and so kept civil.

"After 'e'd whistled a bit for help, a sergeant and another copper came runnin' up, and we all 'ad a good look at 'im. 'E was quite a young feller—about twenty-four—with a slight moustache. The sergeant saw 'ow it 'ad 'appened in once.

"'What's this? He isn't fully dressed; got his night-shirt on, and a muffler round his neck.'

"We all bent forward, and the sergeant added, 'I see. He was off for the doctor. At any rate, he got out of bed in a hurry.'

"The two coppers went off for a stretcher while the sergeant took down all particulars. At first 'e was inclined to be a bit sharp, but, seein' 'ow upset I was, 'e grew quite pally and told me to buck up.

"Well, they identified 'im. It appears 'e was livin' with 'is old father and mother. They were well-to-do folk. His father 'ad been taken ill in the night, and 'e'd just 'opped on his bicycle to go for the doctor.

"They were both at the inquest—both 'is father and mother—and I never seed two people take on so. I 'eard 'is father—a stern-lookin' old customer—say, as they left the room, that 'e 'adn't be'aved well by 'is son, and that 'e 'ad always been 'arsh. 'Owever that may be, they brought in death by misadventure, and it seemed as if the whole thing was done with.

"And now, sir, comes the curious part of the story.

"It knocked me over for a bit, and I went down to stay for a week or two at my brother's. 'E's got a dairy near Southampton. And when I came back I thought I was quite myself.

"Well, I drove the cab, and things were goin' on just as usual, when one night late I was drivin' across the Park over the Serpentine, and there wasn't nothing, so far as I knew, in front nor behind me, when suddenly I sees a bicycle comin' along. The accident had made me a bit careful, and I slowed down almost to a walk."

The man paused, took a long drink, and then looked at me solemnly.

"Just before the bicycle got to the cab, the man on it rang 'is bell. I couldn't think wot it was at first that made me jump. It seemed to bring somethin' back to me. The next moment I was in for wot I thought was another smash, for that bicycle came straight into us. The mare, she reared up and nearly 'ad us over, and when she settled down I looked round, and there wasn't nothin' to be seen. As far as I could make out, the bicycle had gone clean through the cab. I drove back as 'ard as I could go to see if I could ketch a sight of it—but no, I couldn't see nothin'.

"I drove 'ome all of a tremble. I didn't tell the missus, as it was just after our eldest 'ad been born and she was a bit shaky.

"When I woke up the next mornin', I began to think as I must 'ave been mistaken and to call myself names for bein' so upset by the first accident.

"For a bit, things went on just as usual, when the same thing 'appened agen, but ten times worse, for this time it was in Piccadilly, just as the people were coming out of the theatres and I was looking for a fare. My mare must 'ave seen it, too, for she nearly went into a 'bus. A copper swore at me, and a private coachman told me I ought to be drivin' cattle to market.

"Well, sir, I drove round to a little 'pub' I knew, and went in to 'ave a drink. The barmaid asked me if I'd seen a ghost. I didn't tell 'er the truth—wot was the use? She'd only 'ave thought I was drunk. I'd 'ad enough of my cab for that day, and I went 'ome.

"For the space of a month or so nothing 'appened, and then it was worse than ever. This time I was drivin' a lady, and gentleman 'ome Earl's Court way. I 'ad to turn up by 'The Boltons,' sir, and as I rounded the corner I saw it comin' about fifty yards off. Luckily, I'd jest got presence of mind enough to pull my mare in, or else she was that frightened that we might 'ave 'ad an 'orrible accident. As it was, she bolted for her life to the Fulham Road. The gentleman shouted and the lady screamed, which makes me think, now I come to look back, that she wasn't a real lady, for it's jest what the real-bred ones don't do. If you see a carriage runnin' away and you 'ear somebody a-screamin', take my word for it, it's the nurse or somebody.

"The gentleman threatened to give me in charge, and I was so upset that I couldn't actually command my own voice, so 'e absolutely refused to pay me my fare and went indoors.

"I could see this wouldn't do; I'd got a wife and child, and couldn't afford to get killed, so I confided in a pal of mine. I think 'e thought I was mad at first, but by degrees 'e believed me, and agreed to swop horses—at least, for a time. Well, sir, the next time that bicycle came along, I 'eard the bell,

and I saw the bicycle and the man on it, and they seemed to go right through my cab. But the 'orse stood as still as a rock, so evidently it was me and the mare that was in the same boat together.

"I was livin' off the Vauxhall Bridge Road at the time. My wife and I had the top-floor, and very nice rooms they were, and cheap.

"When I got 'ome that night, I went over to the cradle to 'ave a look at the nipper, and blowed if there wasn't another kid lyin' alongside of mine—a pretty youngster, too, and, lyin' together, they looked a picture. My wife came in a minute or two after, and I asked who the stranger might be. It appears she'd struck up an acquaintance with a young woman livin' on the floor below—one back-room. Poor



"No fear of that, Sir. That ghost's laid for ever."

soul, she was 'avin' rather a bad time of it, and my missus took to mindin' the baby for 'er when she was out. She seemed very forlorn—been deserted or something.

"Well, my missus and she got on like a 'ouse on fire—though she was a cut above us. She got to love the wife as if she were 'er own sister, and we both grew mighty fond of the kid. Things were goin' on like this, while every now and then I'd 'ave one of those awful experiences with the bicycle.

"One evening, the young woman told us 'er story. There wasn't much to tell and very little that was new. She'd been married to a young feller as 'ad explained that 'e was obliged to keep it quiet because his father 'ud 'ave cut 'im off with a shillin' if he'd found out that his son 'ad married anyone as 'e didn't approve of. They never lived together, but 'e kept a nice little 'ome goin', till one day 'e disappeared—vanished—and she was left with a baby comin' and not a penny to bless 'erself with. And yet—would you think it?—that woman believed in 'im still! She fetched up 'is photograph, and when it was passed to me I turned quite sick and dizzy.

"I 'ad to take it over to the lamp to look at it, and, different as it was, yet there was the same face that my cab-lamp had fallen on that evening in the lane at Highgate. I didn't say nothing at the moment, but after she'd gone downstairs I told my wife the whole story, and we talked the matter over and decided that she should take the photograph out of the album and that I should go up to Highgate with it.

"Well, sir, it was latish the next evening when I came round the corner of that lane; and I felt creepy, I can tell you. It was quite dusk, and I hadn't gone 'alf-way down before I saw that bicycle coming for me full lick. I can't tell what made me do it, but I stood up and shouted—I don't know wot for. I yelled for all I was worth, and, just as the bicycle got by my 'orse, the bell was rung and the man on it lifted 'is face. It was the face in the photograph, right enough.

"I got a boy to 'old my 'orse and went up to the 'ouse. There was a lot of delay; but, after a good deal of sendin' down to know wot my business was and me sendin' up to say I couldn't tell it to no one but the master of the 'ouse, I was shown into a room with books all round. It was a summer evenin' and the window was open, and the old gentleman was sittin' in a large chair by it.

"At first 'e didn't remember me, and when I brought myself back to 'im 'is face didn't look any too pleasant; but I told my story right through, and I think 'e was goin' to 'ave me turned out, when I 'anded 'im the photograph of 'is son. That finished 'im, and 'e rang the bell and told the servant to fetch 'er mistress. Then I 'ad to go through the whole of my story once more, and when I'd finished I felt the tears come into my eyes as I watched that old couple standin' there holdin' on tight to each other. As we stood in that room after I'd finished my story, you might 'ave 'eard a pin drop, when suddenly there came through the room the sound of that bell. They 'eard it, and I said to them—

"'Yes, lady, an' you, sir—that's the bell right enough.'

"And then I went 'ome, they beggin' me to say nothin' about it till they 'd made further inquiries.

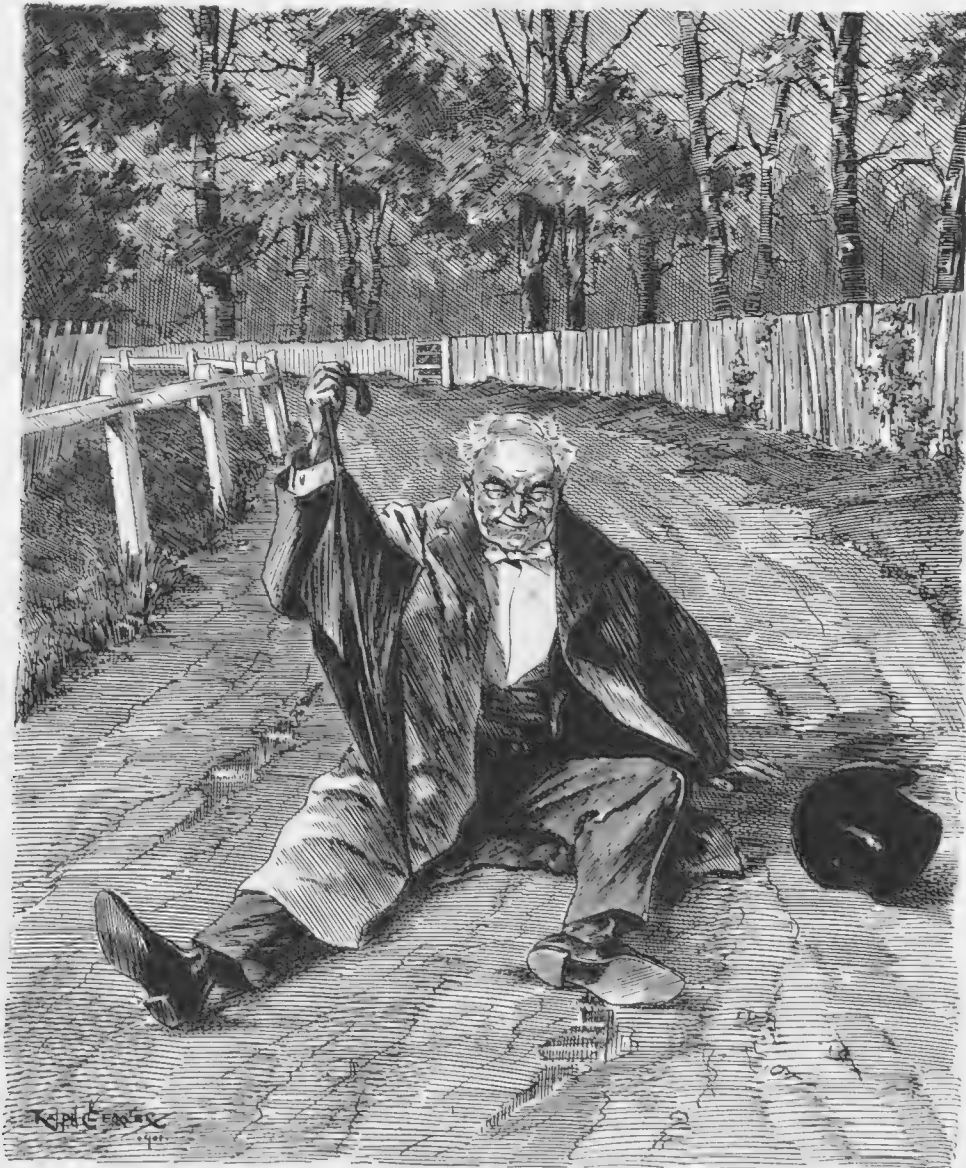
"But it all come right, and if you could 'ave seen that old lady with the young woman's baby, and the old man standin' by, tryin' to pretend as he wasn't cryin' like a child, you'd 'ave said you'd never seen such a sight. And as for me, sir, I've never seen that bicycle nor 'eard that bell since."

The cabby rose, buttoned his coat, and moved towards the door.

"I 'ope I 'aven't kept you up, sir."

"No, no; I've been most interested! Hope you won't meet any bicycles to-night, cabby."

"No fear of that, sir. That ghost's laid for ever."



FATHER — CHRISTMAS.

DRAWN BY RALPH CLEAVER.





By A. ST. JOHN ADCOCK.

I.

A century back, more or less  
(The date could be easily verified),  
I had but to rustle my dress  
And people who heard it were terrified;  
I haunted my favourite spot,  
And none had the courage to flout me—  
Ah, Christmas at that time would not  
Have been like a Christmas without me!



II.

Sir Claude and his family, then,  
Their guests at the Castle baronial,  
Their maids, and their staid serving-men,  
I could scare till they froze, white and stony all:  
I thrilled them each year with affright;  
To think of me made them feel gloomy,  
Because they believed in me, quite,  
Although they could always see through me.

III.

But now, none recoil from my clutch,  
Men are too scientific and sceptical;  
I can't make them quail at my touch,  
Though their flesh I with fingers adept tickle.  
For servants and guests, like their hosts,  
Misled by mere practical manuals,  
Reply, if you question them, "Ghosts?  
There are none—except in the Annuals!"



IV.

To-night, when I'm haunting my Lord,  
Though something that's queer I shall see he sees  
(He's grandson to good old Sir Claude),  
I know he won't think that it's me he sees:  
He'll blink, and, perceiving me still,  
Without the least shudder or shiver,  
He'll get out of bed for a pill,  
And assume something's wrong with his liver!

V.

Last Yule, from my Lord I withdrew,  
And to make Lady Jane shocked and chilly meant:  
To her bedside at midnight I flew,  
In my weirdest, most gory habiliment.  
She saw me, she stared in my face,  
But observed, "What a singular, wry sight!  
My oculist really must trace  
What it is that's affecting my eyesight!"

VI.

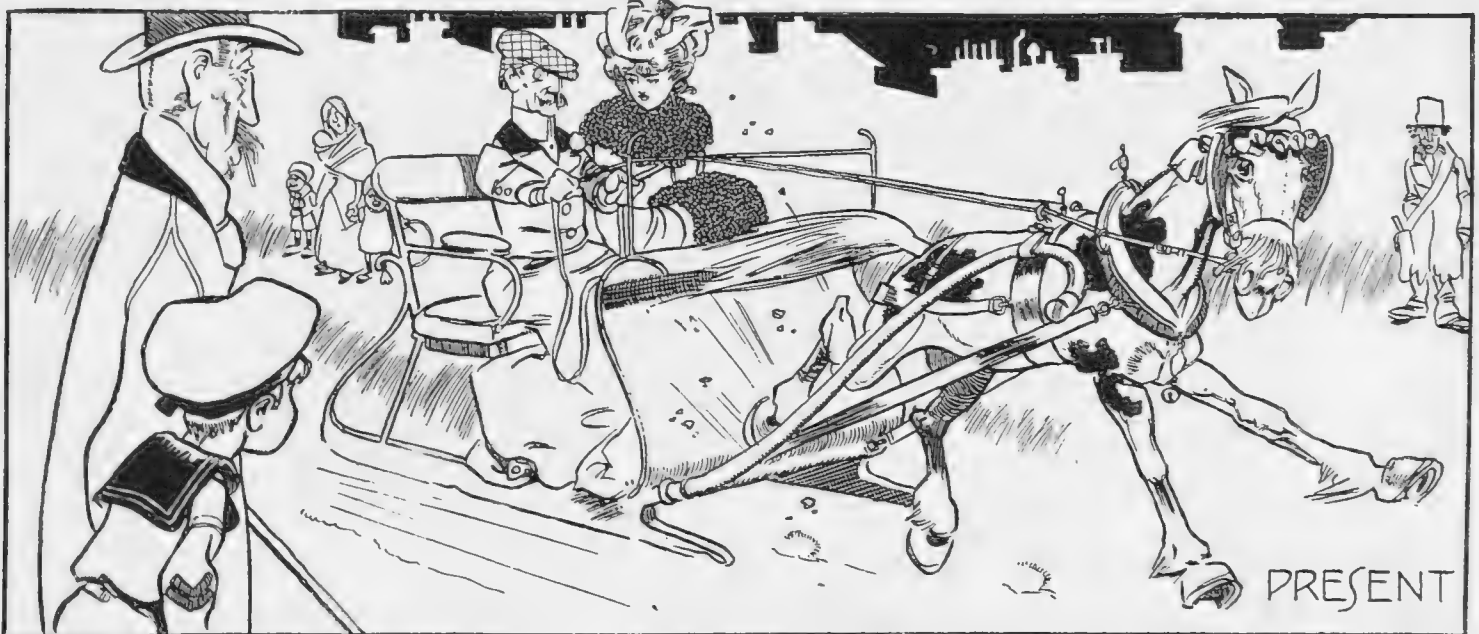
Though men be thus spiritless, they  
Are lacking in proper humility;  
They proudly explain me away  
And call me an impossibility.  
If I opened a door, once, and grinned,  
Men and maids shrieked, and fled from me, mostly;  
Now they shut it and say, "It's the wind,"  
And they never see anything ghostly.

VII.

Yes, it seems that I'm past all belief;  
Folks who still remain true to what's edible,  
Who believe still in pudding and beef,  
Think the old Christmas spirit's incredible.  
I'm an idle illusion, they boast,  
And it makes me so helplessly mad, O!  
They'd drive me to give up the ghost,  
If I wasn't already a shadow!

THE END.





THE SLEIGH AND THE HONEY-MOON.

DRAWN BY RENÉ BULL.



# LADY DELIA

By THOMAS COBB.

Illustrated by RALPH CLEAVER.

LADY DELIA felt that she must tell somebody of her astounding experience, and when Janet Waymark called in Grosvenor Square at five o'clock on the last Tuesday in November the desired opportunity seemed to be provided. The recollection caused her face to flush again with indignation, and Janet could not help admitting the great attractiveness of the girl whom a year ago she had regarded as a child.

"You can't imagine anything half so dreadful!" said Lady Delia, holding back her head disdainfully.

"Dreadful things don't happen to children of your age," answered Janet, with the calm superiority of twenty-five. She was a small woman, rather fond of admitting that her only attraction was an income of twenty thousand pounds a-year.

"But it *has* happened," Lady Delia insisted, "though it's difficult to believe that any man could do such a thing!"

"Who is he and what has he done?" asked Janet.

"I told you," Lady Delia explained, "that Will and I were getting up some private theatricals for our house-party."

Affairs connected with the Ministry, of which he was a distinguished member, had brought the Earl of Wharfstead to London at a time when he would have preferred to be amongst his pheasants; but he fully intended to return to his country place for Christmas.

"We are doing a comedietta," Lady Delia continued, "and in an evil hour I consented to take a part in a farce as well—a very small part: a parlour-maid, who hasn't a dozen words to say."

"Well?" suggested Janet, languidly.

"We had a rehearsal here yesterday afternoon," said Lady Delia, "and I put on a black frock and the most elaborate cap and apron—"

"No doubt you looked ravishing!" cried Janet, a little enviously.

"Oh, well!" Lady Delia admitted, "if the wretched things hadn't suited me, I suppose it wouldn't have happened. After the rehearsal, they all went away but Barbara, and I insisted on going downstairs to let her out."

"You were determined to live up to your part!"

"There was no one in the hall," said Lady Delia, "so I opened the street-door. Barbara begged me not to show myself, but it was almost dark, and I could only be taken for one of our own servants, you know. Anyhow," Lady Delia continued, "I was standing in the middle of the doorway, when a hansom stopped and a man—"

"Young?" asked Janet.

"About twenty-five, I suppose."

"And lovely?"

"He was rather good-looking—"

"But, of course," Janet suggested, "if it was almost dark, you couldn't see very much of him."

"Anyhow," said Lady Delia, "he took me for the parlour-maid. He came into the hall, and—and what could I do?" she demanded, throwing out her hands.

"If I had been in your place," cried Janet, "I should have run away! But, then, if I had been there, it wouldn't have been necessary."

"You see," Lady Delia explained, "he pressed on and so I was obliged to draw back. Then he stared at me and asked whether Will was at home."

"And after that," said Janet, "I suppose he went away—?"

"No, he didn't," was the reply. "He wanted to know whether Will was in London, and promised to call again the day after to-morrow—that's to-morrow, you know. And then—"

"Well?" urged Janet.

"Oh, I wish I hadn't!" said Lady Delia; "but I—I felt rather curious to know who he was, so I asked his name."

"Still keeping to your rôle of parlour-maid?"

"Why, of course!"

"I don't see that it was quite a matter of course," said Janet.

"Anyhow," Lady Delia continued, "I asked his name, and he took out a card-case. He seemed to be rather nervous."

"Poor, dear man!"

"He fumbled with the card, you know, and once or twice he looked at me, and I—I—"

"What did you do?"

"I happened to be looking at him."

"Strange!" said Janet, reflectively.

"Then he gave me the card and our hands touched," Lady Delia continued, and Janet noticed that she was breathing very quickly.

"An accident, no doubt."

"The next moment," cried Lady Delia, indignantly, "he had the audacity to put his arm round my waist and—and he kissed my mouth!"

"Oh!" said Janet, and Lady Delia covered her face with her hands. "Is that the end of the story?" Miss Waymark asked, presently.

"Nearly."

"You may as well tell me the rest, even if it does seem like an anti-climax."

"It's only that he—he swore," faltered Lady Delia.

"He swore at you?"



"At himself, I suppose," was the answer. "I was intensely stupid. I couldn't help crying, and, perhaps, he felt a little ashamed."

"Don't you think he ought to?" cried Janet.

"Oh, it was horrible—abominable! But what am I to do?"

"To do?"

"Janet," said Lady Delia, "did you ever hate anybody—not dislike, but really hate, you know?"

Janet shook her head.

"Too dangerous," she returned. "They say that if you press an intensely cold iron to your flesh you can't tell whether it's hot or frozen. Extremes meet, you understand. May I hear his name?" asked Janet.

"Sir Francis Sargent," said Lady Delia.

She was too deeply absorbed by her own indignation to notice Janet's sudden expression of astonishment.

"I would do anything sooner than meet him again!" she exclaimed.

"That would prove a little uncomfortable for Sir Francis also," suggested Janet, quietly.

"I want him to feel uncomfortable," said Lady Delia. "Will was talking about him last night," she continued. "He said he should invite him to Wharfstead for Christmas; besides, he will come to-morrow."

"If he felt ashamed of himself," answered Janet, "he will probably stay away."

Lady Delia did not answer for a moment.

"I am positive he will come," she said, with her face aflame.

"Well," suggested Janet, rising from her chair, "suppose you spend to-morrow afternoon with me. Will you?"

"Then," said Lady Delia, "I shall not see him."

"Do you want to see him?" demanded Janet, sharply.

"Of course not! How can you suggest such a thing?" Lady Delia retorted.

"Then I shall expect you to-morrow afternoon!"

Lady Delia accordingly set forth at about four o'clock to Park Lane. Janet being an only child, and having lost her mother several years ago, was entirely her own mistress. Lady Delia fancied that she seemed nervous and excited that afternoon, as they sat discussing their friends for ten minutes without interruption. But then the drawing-room door opened, and, to Lady Delia's consternation, the butler announced, "Sir Francis Sargent."

He entered with the easy, self-possessed air of the modern young man, advancing with his hand outstretched to Janet.

"So glad you were able to come!" she exclaimed. "I wanted you so much to know my friend, Lady Delia. Lady Delia Herrick—Sir Francis Sargent."

All his self-possession left him, and for once in his life Sargent was entirely embarrassed. For a few moments he stood staring at Lady Delia and wishing that the floor might open to engulf him. His left

hand trembled as he held his hat and cane, and with his right he nervously twisted his dark moustache.

"Have you met Lady Delia before?" asked Janet, with well-counterfeited astonishment.

"I—I think I have had—had that pleasure," he stammered; and nothing could have annoyed Lady Delia more than this manner of describing their previous encounter.

"Where was that?" asked Janet, whilst Lady Delia now recovered herself sufficiently to dart a reproachful glance at her friend.

"Perhaps Lady Delia scarcely recollects—," muttered Sargent, not knowing, indeed, what to say.

"I recollect perfectly," said Lady Delia, in her most dignified manner.

"It was quite lately, then?" Janet persisted.

"Our last—our last meeting," Sargent answered, aware that he was hopelessly floundering, "may not be an agreeable reminiscence to Lady Delia."

"You can't have the assurance to say you share her feeling!" cried Janet.

Lady Delia sat stiffly erect, with a flushed face and shining eyes, and even Janet recognised that she had never looked more bewitching.

"No," he answered quietly, "I can't say that."

An embarrassing silence followed, Sargent devoutly wishing he could decently go away.

"A man is like the moon," said Janet, abruptly.

"When it's under a cloud!" exclaimed Sir Francis.

"We see him night after night," Janet continued, "yet it seems that there's one side that's always hidden from us."

"No doubt some of us have our dark sides," he admitted.

"Very dark!" said Lady Delia, significantly, and at that he rose and shook hands with Janet. With a

bow for Lady Delia and an expression which was intended to be contrite, he left the room, and before Lady Delia could turn upon Janet she began to defend herself.

"I know you must think I have treated you abominably!" she cried.

"I think you have," was the answer.

"It was no use," Janet admitted. "I couldn't resist the temptation."

"You didn't even tell me you knew him!" said Lady Delia, indignantly.

"That would have hindered his punishment!" exclaimed Janet. "You will admit he deserved it?"

"I don't think I deserved it, Janet! Besides—"

"Well?"

"Only that I am quite capable of managing my own affairs. It was scarcely your business."



"I couldn't help crying, and, perhaps, he felt a little ashamed."



"Oh, but indeed it was! I admit you are a victim. I met Sir Francis in Switzerland during the autumn. He was introduced to my father; he became—well, attentive to me. Of course," said Janet, with a sigh, "I was an idiot. I tried to persuade myself that, at last, I had met a man who didn't think only of my money."

"I wish I hadn't told you a word about it," said Lady Delia, after a short pause.

"My dear, I shall always feel grateful to you!"

"Still," was the answer, "you chose an odd way to show gratitude."

"I am afraid I didn't think much about you," Janet admitted. "Oh," she exclaimed, "to remember that he pretended to care, and yet, half-an-hour after leaving me, he could kiss a house-maid! It is atrocious!"

"But," said Lady Delia, "he didn't."

"Didn't what?"

"He didn't—he didn't kiss a house-maid."

"Anyhow, that was what he thought he was doing!" cried Janet.

"Oh, of course, it was hateful of him!" said Lady Delia, as she rose from her chair.

A few days passed without any further sign of Sir Francis Sargent, although Lady Delia gathered that Will had met him at the Club. There were a good many of her "set" in London just now, and one evening, during the first week of December, Lady Delia went to a small and early dance at Mrs. Prince's, and there, with curious sensations, she saw Sargent.

He had obviously recovered from the embarrassment which he had shown at Janet's, and, approaching with complete audacity, he bowed to Lady Delia.

"I have had the honour of meeting you before," he began, and his impudence almost bewildered her. "May I ask you for a dance?" he added.

"Certainly not!" was all she could say, although the words seemed entirely inadequate.

"Well," he continued, "if you will not dance with me, I hope, at least, you will give me a chance to explain——"

"There is one thing I hope devoutly," said Lady Delia.

"What is that?" he asked, leaning towards her.

"That you will never let me see you again!"

The next moment she scarcely knew whether to feel angry or amused, but Lady Delia determined to feel angry.

"We cannot talk here," said Sargent.

"I have not the slightest wish to talk to you anywhere," she rejoined.

"I only wish you to listen, you know," he continued, with a smile; and, finding that she did not answer, he sat down by her side. "I have succeeded in solving the mystery," he remarked the next moment. "I braved Miss Waymark again——"

"It must have required courage," said Lady Delia; but then she grew angry with herself.

"Yes, it did," he admitted. "But I am not accustomed to sleepless nights. I was bound to discover why you were masquerading——"

"Oh, please—please——!"

"I know," he went on, "that Miss Waymark has been giving me a bad character."

"Your deeds spoke for you," said Lady Delia, carried away by an impulse of the moment.

"You ignore my immense temptation," he answered.

"I think you acted disgracefully!"

"Peccavi!" cried Sir Francis.

"For a—a gentleman to come to his friend's house and insult a—a servant!"

"Oh, well, I didn't, you know."

"You thought I—I was a servant!" she insisted.

"Upon my word, I thought you were a goddess!" he said, bending eagerly towards her.

"You—you showed very little veneration," was the answer.

"I want you to bury the hatchet," he urged, "and accept me as your brother's friend."

"It seems to me," said Lady Delia, "that you must be a very undesirable friend for him."

Sargent glanced at her askant as he stroked his moustache. He came to the conclusion that he knew more about Lord William Herrick than his sister.

"Still," he persisted, "can you feel justified in repulsing a penitent?"

"I shall not refuse to meet you——," Lady Delia began.

"Then life will become worth living again!" he exclaimed.

"For Janet's sake—if you succeed in making your peace with her," said Lady Delia.

"I fancy," he returned, "that you have a wrong impression——"

"Here is my partner!" she cried. "I shall say no more about it."

She took excellent care to avoid him during the rest of that evening, although she perceived that he was the handsomest man in the room. He appeared to be very popular also, and, if he had not acted so lamentably, Lady Delia would not have been unwilling to dance with him.

She had made up her mind to avoid Janet Waymark for the remainder of her days, but, nevertheless, she paid a visit to Park Lane early in the following week.

"You are nothing if not magnanimous," said Janet, without much warmth of welcome. "How are your plays going along?" she asked, presently.

"I wish we were going to stay in London," answered Lady Delia, with a sigh.

"Why?"

"Oh, it is dreadful!" cried Lady Delia. "Will has invited Sir Francis Sargent to Wharfstead——"

"Is he coming?" asked Janet, eagerly.

"It is very abominable of him," was the answer.

"You know that Lady Wharfstead invited me for Christmas week?" said Janet.

"Of course, we are all delighted!" cried Lady Delia.

Wharfstead House was to be quite full for Christmas, and Janet Waymark was the last guest to arrive. With regard to Sargent, Lady Delia found herself in an embarrassing position, since it seemed inevitable that the daughter of the house should treat him with something approaching courtesy. On the one or two occasions of their meetings since Mrs. Prince's dance, Lady Delia had ignored his presence as far as in her lay, but on the afternoon of his arrival at Wharfstead she happened to be alone in the drawing-room.

"I confess," he said, as she gave him her finger-tips, "that I have come with a guilty conscience."

"It would have been better to follow its dictates," she retorted.

"The question arose in my mind," he said.

"How could you hesitate about the answer?" cried Lady Delia.

"You must understand that another organ came into play," he returned.

"Oh yes, of course!" Lady Delia answered. "You know that Janet Waymark is coming."

Before Sargent could answer, her brother entered, and, meeting Delia again after taking the guest to his room, Herrick reproached her concerning her treatment of Sir Francis.

"Upon my word," he said, "I can't understand why you always give the chap the cold shoulder. He isn't a bit used to that sort of thing."

"I dare say he isn't," answered Lady Delia, with a crimson face.

On the following morning, the men and some of the ladies went out after Lord Wharfstead's pheasants, whilst Lady Delia drove to meet them, in her governess-cart, for luncheon. As Sargent said that he had twisted his foot, Lord Wharfstead suggested that he should be driven home by Lady Delia, who looked annoyed in consequence. The cart being small, and the pony smaller, it would have been cruel to the animal to include a third person.

"Sorry," said Lady Delia, as the pony trotted slowly homewards, "that you have met with such a serious accident."

"Oh, it's of no consequence!" he returned.

"I didn't imagine it was!" she exclaimed.

"The fact is that I am bound to speak to you," said Sargent.

"A little shabby to make an excuse," she suggested.

"All's fair in love——"

"I was forgetting," answered Lady Delia, "that Janet would arrive before the others returned! I beg your pardon, Sir Francis?" she added, putting back her head.

"It was nothing," he mumbled.

"You certainly said something!"

"Nothing you ought to have heard," he answered.

"By-the-bye," she continued, "I have heard it on your lips before!"



*"He didn't—he didn't kiss a house-maid."*

"LADY DELIA." (SEE PAGE 26.)



"Lady Delia," he said.

"Well?"

"I am going to run the risk of mortally offending you."

"It is a day after the fair," she retorted.

"When I look back——"

"How hateful that you should be able to look back to that!" she exclaimed.

"It wasn't the pony's fault, you know," urged Sargent, as she lightly plied the whip. "When I remember that day——"

"I hope you feel as intensely ashamed as I do," she said.

"Do you?" he whispered, leaning forward in the cart.

She stared into his face for a moment.

"What do you mean?" she demanded.

"It's no use going in for subterfuge," he continued, "because it is my most pleasant——"

"You are insulting me!" cried Lady Delia.

"I told you," he answered, "that I ran the risk of mortally offending you. But I want to ask whether, when you look back——"

"I always avoid it!" she insisted.

"Then, when I remind you——"

"It ought to be the very last thing you could do."

"Yes, I know," he returned. "But the end sometimes justifies the means. I want to know whether—candidly—the recollection is wholly detestable?"

"It is absolutely and entirely hateful!" answered Lady Delia, and he rubbed his ankle as if it pained him acutely, although it did not.

"I am sorry," he said, quietly.

"Did you imagine it could be anything else?" she demanded.

"Oh, well, I hoped——"

"How strangely you must think of me!"

"As I have never thought of any other woman," he protested.

"That," said Lady Delia, "is fortunate for the others."

"Yes—perhaps," he admitted, and she looked straight at the pony's ears.

"A man who could insult a servant! Because," she continued, hastily, "if you had known who I was, you would never have dared——"

"Not then," he answered.

"What do you mean?" she cried.

"Of course, I should have had to wait for the privilege," he said.

"But——"

"There is Janet!" exclaimed Lady Delia, as they came within sight of the house and saw Miss Waymark and her maid in the act of alighting from Lord Wharfstead's black omnibus. The visitor was the most self-possessed of the group; and a few moments later they all went to Lady Wharfstead in the drawing-room.

After the house became at last quiet that night, Lady Delia tapped at Janet's door.

"Had you been seeing much of Sir Francis before he came here?" she inquired, looking charming in her pale-blue robe.

"Oh, pretty well!" said Janet, with a shrug.

"He twisted his ankle this morning," Lady Delia continued, "and my father told me to drive him home."

"So you think I may be jealous!" cried Janet, with a curious kind of laugh.

She was a woman with few illusions, and, from the outset, she recognised the only motives which could induce Sargent to ask her to marry him. But, in truth, the wish had been father to that thought, and, without being passionately in love, she had arrived at the conclusion that Sir Francis would make a tolerable husband as things went. Although she was not broken-hearted when she saw the position of affairs at Wharfstead House, she became bitterly angry and vindictive.

Her vexation reached the maximum on the evening of the play, when a number of persons from the neighbourhood reinforced the house-party. The comedietta, which came first, was acted neither better nor worse than is usual with such things in similar circumstances, but it probably caused greater pleasure to the actors than to the audience.

Janet's seat afforded an uninterrupted view of Sargent, whose eyes, especially during the farce, scarcely left Lady Delia's face. It was true that she looked ravishing in the parlour-maid's dress, and, when the play ended and the actors and actresses mingled with the other guests in their stage make-up, Sir Francis, leaning against the wall by the door, was by way of making himself conspicuous.

And Lady Delia, seeming to be aware of her power in this guise in which Sargent had first seen her, might be suspected of a tendency

to exert it. Janet felt perplexed by the problem which Lady Delia presented, marvelling whether in truth the girl's wrath was as overwhelming as she had insisted. On the impulse of a moment, Janet set forth in search of Herrick—a hot-tempered young man; unusually devoted to his sister.

"Intensely hot in here!" she cried, resting a hand familiarly on his arm. "Can't we find some cooler air?" So he led her to a secluded corner of the hall. "By-the-bye," she added, "has Delia forgiven your friend, Sir Francis, yet?"

"What on earth has she to forgive?" demanded Herrick.

"Didn't she tell you?"

"I only know she usually treats the chap villainously," he answered, and at that moment they saw Lady Delia cross the other end of the hall and disappear into the billiard-room, to be followed a few seconds later by Sargent.

"Is that your notion of villainous treatment?" asked Janet, forcing a laugh.

"I never pretend to understand a woman," said Herrick.

"Well, it's a little hard in the present case," she rejoined. "If a man had insulted me in that way——"

"Insulted!" exclaimed Herrick, quickly; and then Janet gave her own version of the affair.

In the meantime, Sir Francis shut the door of the billiard-room.

"Now, this," he murmured, "is the very kindest thing you have done for me!" and he stood with one hand on the cushion of the billiard-table, gazing into her face.

"Only because of your importunity," said Lady Delia.

"Will you grant me anything if I am only importunate enough?" he asked.

"As much as you deserve!" she retorted.

"Ah, but I don't imagine I deserve it!" he continued. "I admit that I acted like a——"

"There is no need to revile yourself," she answered.

"But, upon my word," he said, "now I see you again as you looked that afternoon, I find it difficult to blame myself very severely."

"The woman tempted me!" said Lady Delia. "It is the old story."

"Why, yes," he urged, "if you will only let me tell it."

"How many editions have there been already?" she asked.

"It is the first," he answered.

"Janet?" she suggested.

"I don't feel guilty in that case," he said. "My people wished me to——"

"Oh, I quite understand you!" she cried, with a laugh.

"Then," he returned, "you must know that I love you——"

Sir Francis found it necessary to set a watch upon his tongue as the door of the billiard-room opened and Herrick entered with an ominous face. For a moment the three stood regarding each other in silence, Lady Delia flushed and a little nervous, Sir Francis with a frown on his brow, Herrick obviously bent on mischief.

"I want a word with you, Sargent!" he exclaimed.

"Would it make much difference if you had it five minutes later?" asked Sir Francis, striving after patience.

"I should like to know what the devil you meant by——"

"Will!" said Lady Delia. "The play is over, you know."

"Sargent has acted like an infernal——"

"What did he do?" she demanded, drawing herself to her full height.

"Anyhow," said Will, more wrathful now with his sister than with his friend, "you don't seem much to mind it!"

"What?" demanded Lady Delia.

"Janet told me that Sargent had insulted you!" cried Herrick, devoutly wishing he had not attempted to interfere.

"How very foolish of her!" said Lady Delia.

"The first time you met——"

"Oh, no doubt," she answered, "F—Francis was a little precipitate."

"Look here, Herrick," exclaimed Sir Francis, suddenly reviving, "Delia is going to make the best of me! The fact is, she is going to be my wife!"

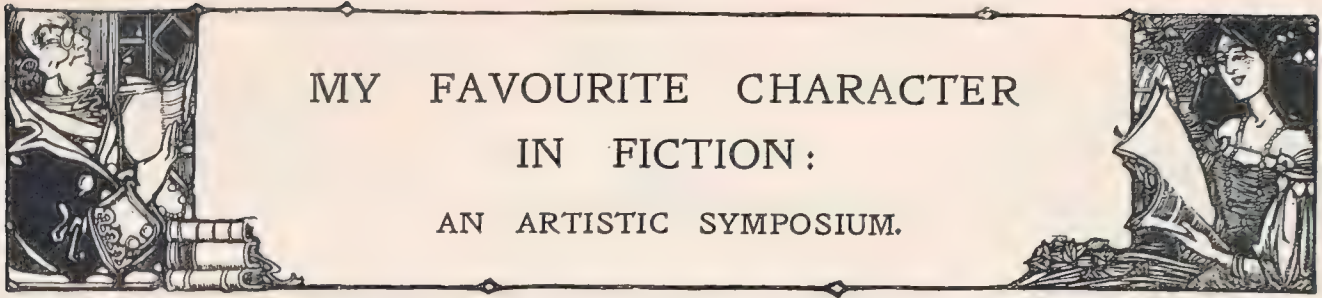
"Good Lord!" said Herrick, staring from the one to the other. "When did that come about?"

Lady Delia raised her eyes and, as they met Sargent's, she smiled.

"When was it?" she faltered, and she lowered her eyes again.

"I think," he answered, "it was a foregone conclusion from the first," and, as he drew nearer and took Lady Delia's hands, Herrick thought it discreet to withdraw. Janet did not in the least enjoy his subsequent explanation.





"MILADY." By R. CATON WOODVILLE, R.I.

"Monseigneur," replied Milady, "a fair exchange; existence for existence, man for man; give me one, I will give you the other."  
"I don't know what you mean . . .," replied the Cardinal; "but I wish to please you, and see nothing inconvenient in giving you what you ask for with respect to so mean a creature; the more so as you tell me this paltry D'Artagnan is a libertine, a duellist, and a traitor."—"THE THREE MUSKETEERS."



MY FAVOURITE CHARACTER  
IN FICTION.



ALI BABA. By JOHN HASSALL, R.I.

"Open, Sesame!"—"THE FORTY THIEVES."



MY FAVOURITE CHARACTER  
IN FICTION.



DON QUIXOTE. By DUDLEY HARDY, R.I.

*"Yet at last his wicked arts shall prove of small force against the goodness of my sword."—DON QUIXOTE.*



MY FAVOURITE CHARACTER  
IN FICTION.



PEG WOFFINGTON. By LEONARD LINSDELL.

*It certainly was a dazzling creature: she had a head of beautiful form, perched like a bird upon a throat massive, yet shapely and smooth as a column of alabaster, a symmetrical brow, black eyes full of fire and tenderness, a delicious mouth, with a hundred varying expressions, and that marvellous faculty of giving beauty alike to love or scorn, a sneer or a smile. But she had one feature more remarkable than all, her eyebrows—the actor's feature; they were jet-black, strongly marked, and in repose were arched like a rainbow.—“PEG WOFFINGTON.”*



MY FAVOURITE CHARACTER  
IN FICTION.



DIANA VERNON. By W. D. ALMOND, R.I.

*She wore, what was then somewhat unusual, a coat, vest, and hat, resembling those of a man, which fashion has since called a riding-habit.—“ROB ROY.”*



MY FAVOURITE CHARACTER  
IN FICTION.



JOHN RIDD. By G. L. STAMPÀ.

*While I was forgetting much of many things that harm one, and letting of my thoughts go wild to sounds and sights of nature, a sweeter note than thrush or ouzel ever wooed a mate in floated on the valley breeze at the quiet turn of sundown. The words were of an ancient song, fit to cry or laugh at. . . . All this I took in with great eagerness.—"LORNA DOONE."*



MY FAVOURITE CHARACTER  
IN FICTION.



LORNA DOONE. By OSCAR WILSON.

*He set her dainty little form upon his great square shoulder, and her narrow feet in one broad hand; and so in triumph marched away, with the purple velvet of her skirt ruffling in his long black beard, and the silken length of her hair fetched out, like a cloud by the wind, behind her.—"LORNA DOONE."*



MY FAVOURITE CHARACTER  
IN FICTION.



BECKY SHARP. By LEWIS BAUMER.

*Her hair hung in curls round her neck; one of her little feet peeped out from the fresh, crisp folds of the silk: the prettiest little foot in the prettiest little sandal in the finest silk stocking in the world.—"VANITY FAIR."*





## DÉSIRÉE'S FRIEND

by Katharine Tynan

Illustrated by W. D. ALMOND.

THE rain dripped from every pointed and shining leaf of the Portugal laurels. It rained every day in this sad country. The sea was a mere grey blur; the lawn was like a wet, green sponge. The rain had wept on the stuccoed house-front, and had left long green trails from all the eaves.

"I can't get out! I can't get out!" lamented Désirée's parrot. "How it rains! how it rains!" — cocking his bright-green head aside.

He had caught the lament from his little mistress, who had been shut in by the weather and her aunt's will ever since she had been brought here, making a stormy passage in the packet-boat that took several days to do its journey between England and Ireland. That journey, and the journey from France which preceded it, were like a dream of fatigue to little Désirée, who was not strong.

She had been very well content among her playmates in the French convent. Often now she yearned after the grey sea-flats, the long, level shores, which were something home-like and merry to her. Here it was always raining, and the rank vegetation about the house seemed to choke Désirée, to have so many mouths for breathing that there was no fresh air left for her delicate lungs.

Désirée, her cousin Anthony had mocked clownishly at the name. She was a small, pale, childish, very young girl, with a sallowness of skin and a darkness of eyes which her straight white silk frocks accentuated.

The good nuns had placed Désirée under the protection of the Mother of God, seeing that she was an orphan and in especial peril in the world she must enter, since she was the heiress to a great fortune. So she wore the white silk frocks always, with a blue sash about her little waist, and a blue ribbon in her dull, fair, silky hair, blue and white being the colours of her Patroness.

Anthony had mocked at the unsuitability of her name even in her presence; safely, for the child had not discovered the mockery.

She had a simple admiration for Anthony, so long as he kept his distance. Once or twice, when he had offered her a rough, cousinly caress, she had been frightened, and had run away to her room, oddly terrified of him, and herself, and all the world.

Fortunately, Anthony's caresses were seldom offered. Anthony was being brought up to the point of proposing marriage to her, with many jibbings and kicking up of the heels, and other signs of

rebellion, which would have been alarming if his mother had not had him so thoroughly in hand, and been so sure of her power over him.

His mother, Mrs. Devereux, was a cold, placid, silken-spoken woman, with large, shadowless blue eyes, and a thin red mouth that snapped like a vice. Tom Devereux had thought her an uncommonly fine woman when he married her, and had been under her thumb to the last day of his life. Anthony was the image of him, dark, handsome, with a tendency to coarseness, fond of pleasure, blustering, good-natured so long as his appetites were not interfered with, weak as water in the hands of the strong woman who had borne him and had transmitted him nothing at all of herself.

He had his head down on his folded arms on the table in his mother's room when little Désirée passed down the stairs on her way to the book-room. Désirée had no idea that he was in the house, but half-way down the stairs she paused with her parrot on her shoulder, and stood looking up at the frescoed head of a lady that was above the double mahogany doors between the inner and the outer hall. She thought she had heard the sound of sobbing from her aunt's room. After a second, hearing no more and recognising the unlikelihood of her supposition—Aunt Arabella looked the last person in the world to disturb the smooth ivory of her face with tears—she went on her way.

As a matter of fact, she had heard her cousin sob. If she could have looked through the closed doors, she would have seen him lie in that ignominious abandonment while his mother contemplated the shaken, shaggy head with a gaze in which contempt and fondness were oddly blent.

"My dear boy," she said, in her velvet voice, "we can't keep the child hidden much longer. Even though we are her lawful guardians, people will be curious about the possessor of so much wealth. Once she is seen you are lost. Other people will not be so laggard. Désirée's fortune . . ."

"Désirée!" he said, savagely, lifting his disordered, handsome face and glaring with his bloodshot eyes, "Désirée! What a name for that ugly, little, sickly ape. As though anyone could ever desire her!"

"Her mother's folly; but she is well-gilt, Anthony. Other men will not be so ungallant. I can't keep her for you much longer, my son."

"Other men might have her and welcome! Have you no heart, mother? You know that I am fond of Betty King, that I'd set one glance of her black eyes against this little wretch's fortune. I'm damned fond of her, I tell you. I always have been. And the poor girl believes in me. Hang it, I've a mind to let it all go and marry her! A girl of spirit like that . . ."

"My poor Anthony!"—the contempt in his mother's gaze deepened—"you forget your debts. Betty King is as poor as yourself, and as careless. I wonder what you'd do if you hadn't me."

"Be an honest man, perhaps," muttered Anthony, looking out at the grey wash of sea and sky with heavy eyes.

But all the time he knew, and she knew, that he would do her will, not his own, as his father had done before him.

Meanwhile, Désirée, in the book-room, had forgotten that she was



a prisoner, had forgotten how lonely it was during the weeks when it rained and rained incessantly, and Cousin Anthony did not come near them, and Aunt Arabella's eyes grew colder every day, and her voice more velvety-soft; and these were things which made Désirée instinctively shrink from her, divining some cold heat of anger under that deceptive softness.

Poor little Désirée, she didn't want to marry anybody. She only wanted to go back and finish her childhood in that gaunt convent among the sea-flats. How gentle the nuns were, how merry the little French children! It was the Convent of the Infant Jesus, and the atmosphere of childhood was all about the place. Why, the nuns were no more than wise, grave, merry elder children. Désirée had heard nothing of her fortune there. Only she was a little dearer to the nuns because she had no father and mother like the other children, and so she must be given to the Blessed Mother. How lonely Désirée was for the nuns' eyes, and the demure, bright romps in the playground, and the dormitory with its little white beds, and the glass corridor where they played when it was wet, and had their sewing-classes under the great statue of the Infant Jesus.

Anthony's ways towards her, when he had fallen in for the moment with his mother's will, vaguely perturbed her; but her heart was so swathed up in veils of childhood that she had hardly a glimmering of what the young man's manner meant.

Still, she had her romantic dreams—the things that come to very young girls before it has dawned upon their shrinking consciousness that love can be a thing other than spiritual.

In the book-room she found provender for her dreams, and she found also a spurious gaiety of climate which made one forget the weeping skies and drenched world outside.

The ceiling was blue and gold, a blue ground with gold stars upon it. It was groined, and long lines of gilding came down between the stars to end in many golden roses. The walls were covered in books behind a brass lattice. The window was a bow, with a painting of shepherdesses on the groined ceiling. A door led from it into the garden, where it would have been pleasant to walk if the days ever did anything but rain. As it was, Désirée turned from the fat vegetation and the blackened flower-stalks to simulated Italian skies and the fire of drift-wood on the hearth.

In a recess by the fire there was an organ upon which she had liberty to play. Indeed, within the walls of the house she was at liberty to do what pleased her. Mrs. Devereux was not a woman for petty tyrannies, even if she had not desired to be on good terms with her husband's niece; and Désirée usually had the book-room to herself. If her aunt visited her there, it was only to ask her how she did, and to retire with a soft, gliding footstep. But for the loneliness, the girl had been happy with the books and the organ. But Tim, the parrot, was her only companion. Even her aunt's servants were all old and starched and grim. Tim was very wise and very fond of his little mistress; but a parrot, however dear and wise, will not suffice one for all company.

One night, Désirée had been overtaken by sudden sleep in the book-room. She did not know how it had happened her, for she had been reading "Sir Charles Grandison" and had been deeply enchanted by that courtly hero.

She awoke with a start, conscious before she was fully awake of another presence in the room; and, sure enough, a pair of bright, merry, grey eyes, soft as velvet, were watching her from across the long table that lay between them and her.

Their owner was a young man with an abundant head of brown hair, which he wore in loose locks. One lock strayed carelessly over his forehead. He was very handsome, with a beauty oddly compounded of feminine softness and masculine spirit and fire. Little Désirée, rubbing her eyes, thought it a bewitching face.

He had something like a map spread on the table before him, and his arm was slung carelessly across it. He wore a snuff-brown coat and a green cravat, and there were fine little frills of lace peeping from his coat-sleeve.

"I hope you are refreshed," he said, politely. "I have taken the liberty to replenish the fire while you slept. The night grows cold."

Désirée looked at him in bewilderment.

"I do not know . . .," she began, stammering.

"How I came here," he finished gaily for her. "Why, it is the simplest thing in the world. I am a former owner of the house, and keep the right to come and go. I am often here when you are asleep."

"My aunt . . ."

"Would be the last person to forbid me. Why should she wish to, good lady? I meddle with no one. In this room I spent my happiest hours."

His delightful smile, candid and bewildering, played over Désirée

like the soft play of sunlight through leaves. She gazed at him shyly and said nothing.

"And you are a student?" he went on. "May I ask what engaged you?"

She held one brown, thick volume to him without a word.

"Ah, the fine gentleman of the bookseller!" he said. "So he sent you asleep, this good Samuel. I myself had never time to read him through. Life was too interesting. Except his 'Pamela': I read her for her name's sake. She was a minx with a virtuous face. Stick to 'Sir Charles Grandison,' little one. He can do you no harm."

She received the book back from his hand with a little colour in her childish cheeks. It was as though his smile began to warm her, who had been cold these months back, since she had left her school-fellows and the nuns.

"It is very sad here," she said, looking up at him.

"Sad! Fie!" he smiled. "It was not used to be sad. Was ever such a sweet little room as this book-room? I remember . . . there was a charming woman yonder in the window. She wore a little French jacket. *Ma foi*, I wonder it wasn't a cap of liberty! The plants in the passage outside had been newly watered, and this room smelt like a green-house. The most charming of women had just dressed four beautiful flower-pots and was sitting to her embroidery-frame, while . . ."

He broke off abruptly, with a little laugh.

"Why should I tell you this, child? Those days are dead and gone—dead and gone, their memories dear only to those who are gone with them."

"Ah, but do tell me!" she pleaded, her eyes bright upon him in her ethereal face. "I should like to know about it. Then I shall not be so lonely. I shall think of the lady when I sit here alone. The place seemed to be so sad; always the endless rain, always the dripping shrubberies outside and the sodden garden-beds. And the wind, or something, crying about the house at night. I have had no one, only Tim, my parrot. See how he watches you!"

"A fine, gay, handsome fellow. But as for sadness, child—ah, no, this was not sad! I remember how she sat and played the organ there in the recess. The garden-beds then were full of hyacinths, jonquils, cloves, pinks, and narcissi. On a stand in the window were six beautiful pots of auriculas all out in flower. The lawn was mowed and rolled. There were gentianellas and primroses growing up to the house. The happiest fellow in the world was his own gardener of Eden. Alas!"

He sighed profoundly and the deepest shadow fell over the brightness of his face.

Désirée looked at him wistfully.

"Shall I play to you?" she asked.

He pushed away the big book with its maps which he had been studying.

"That is enough of Fortifications for the present," he said. "Yes, play, child. We shall not disturb the house?"

"My aunt and the servants sleep at the other end, quite out of hearing. I have played here before when I have been lonely."

As he came to her side his sleeve brushed against the bird, which had perched on the chair-back, and the creature fled from the encounter with a little scream, and took refuge on a bust above one of the bookcases.

"That is not like Tim," said his owner. "He is usually the friendliest of birds."

But the parrot refused to be coaxed back, and kept his place under the blue stars, watching the strange gentleman with bright, unblinking eyes.

Désirée played, great, crashing things by Handel which might well test all the strength of her small fingers. The listener wore the face of a virtuoso. At the end it was full of delight.

"Bravo!" he said, bowing to her. "You are a musician though you are only a child. You have given me pleasure. Sometime you will play for me again?"

"Whenever you wish," answered Désirée, eagerly.

"I shall be sure to come," he responded. "Why, I have come without that. But now, child, it is time that you were in bed. Those cheeks, they will never grow roses if you keep such late hours."

He held the door for her with the most graceful of gestures. As she passed through, piteously slender in her white silk, the parrot followed her, flying through the doorway with a low scream of discomfort.

"Tim is jealous that I have found a new friend," said his mistress, playfully reproaching him.

She kept her secret to herself. There was little intimacy between



her and her aunt, and the chill servants repelled her. She never thought that the encounter was something she ought to speak of. Her mind was singularly childish, despite her seventeen years; and had he not said that her aunt would be the last to forbid him the house? If the music gave him solace—and it did—that was enough for Désirée.

After that, it became a common thing for her to steal downstairs when the house slept. Sometimes he was there; sometimes he was not. When Désirée failed to find the brown head in the light of the shaded lamp bent low over the maps and diagrams, it was a lost night for her.

When he was there he talked with her, sometimes of the things he read. He seemed to be always studying questions of military strategy, of attack and defence. Little Désirée strove painfully to follow him in the things he talked of. She did not often understand him, but she was delighted that he should talk to her.

Again he would recall, as he had that first night, his memories of the place. The figure of the lady in the little French jacket became something of an actual personality to the child.

"Does that make things easier for you, my dear boy?" she responded, smoothly. "Yes, I see a change in the child. She grows like a little torch. That colour in her cheeks that is so soon blown out, her transparency. She grows too fast for her strength. And she keeps late hours. I have heard her at the organ an hour after midnight. When will you speak, Anthony?"

She sent him a long, meaning glance which forced his dull intelligence to read it. For a second something of a shameful hope sprang up in his eyes. Then died out again.

"No!" he said, in sullen fury; "I haven't yet come to that, that I want it to die. Let me alone!" Then he slouched from the room in a mood that his mother knew to be dangerous. She had encountered it once or twice in his father, and had had the wit to be silent while it lasted.

Désirée now hardly knew when Anthony came or went. Her old childish beginnings of an admiration for him had merged into an indifference as nearly contemptuous as was possible to her gentle nature. She knew now what the fine flower of courtesy was, and



*"I hope you are refreshed," he said, politely. "I have taken the liberty to replenish the fire while you slept. The night grows cold."*

Or, yet again, he would talk to her of the country, which she had thought of as so wet and melancholy, teaching her to love it. It was February now, and daffodils had come out in the grass, snowdrops in the shrubberies. The birds had begun to sing, and some days an enchanting air blew. From an arbour in the garden Désirée discovered the long line of the mountains. And the dull sea revealed itself as lapis-lazuli and jade and mother-o'-pearl. Désirée became less homesick for the convent on the sea-flats, and the nuns, and the little French children.

She had seen her friend many times now, had talked with him, played to him, and been dismissed to bed night after night with the same gentle courtesy. Tim had never become more friendly, would still fly to the bust on top of the bookcases, and eye the intruder with bright, suspicious glances.

With the interest of this new friendship a change had come over Désirée.

"The little ape grows handsome," said Anthony, making a grudging concession to his mother.

saw Anthony for a clown. Why, by this new knowledge of hers, Sir Charles Grandison himself became a man of wax, a stilted thing without life, without heart.

Then, alas for little Désirée, came the time when her friend seemed to have forgotten her. Perhaps he had other things to think of. Someone died in Paris just then whose death would have interested Désirée if she had known everything. Anyhow, he came no more. Week after week passed, and the strain of hope and disappointment, night after night, began to tell on that delicate body. The colour in her cheeks wavered now so wildly that it looked at times as if the fierce draught must blow it out for ever. Her aunt watched her narrowly, anxiously, grew curiously kind, if but Désirée had had the heart to notice it.

She came upon the child one evening in the spring twilight. Désirée was sitting at the table in the book-room, lying half across a big brown book, the better to see it with her short-sighted eyes. It struck Mrs. Devereux that the shoulder-blades stood up sharply through the white silk frock, that there were hollows behind the small ears.



Something of conscience and heart hitherto unsuspected stirred in the woman. Perhaps she had not quite meant that shameful bribe which she had offered silently to her son. She had no love for bouncing, black-eyed Betty King. With this child she could do anything. Anthony should take her away as soon as they were married to the South, in search of health. Anthony was coming to-morrow to ask Désirée's hand. She had brought him to the point at last—or his debts had.

She put a hand on the silky hair within its confining blue ribbon. She was unused to offering caresses, and this was done coldly and awkwardly.

"What?" she said, leaning to look at the page. "'Pontoon bridges! The art of conveying an army! On attacking an enemy's coast-line!' Why, Désirée, child, what studies!"

Désirée, who had flung herself across the page as though she would hide some treasured secret, closed the book hastily. The fires rose higher in her thin cheeks.

"I took it from there," she said, indicating a blank in the bookshelves. "I thought it a curious old book."

"All those books belonged to the people who lived here thirty-odd years ago. I dare say you know their unhappy fate. The lady died only the other day. What, you do not know? I have books upstairs that will tell you all about them. I wish Mr. Moore had stuck to his Melodies. Already the idlers flock to see the house. As though I should permit it!"

"May I have the books?" asked Désirée, almost in a whisper. She had begun to look scared.

"I shall find them for you. And a portfolio with sketches of them. Crack-brained revolutionaries, seeking to upset the established order, as though that were not always the best! I won't have stories made up about the house while it is mine."

Her voice rose shrilly at the end.

"May I have the books?" asked Désirée again. She spoke as though her tongue were dry in her mouth.

"You are too much alone," said the woman, looking at her almost with compassion. "You sit up at night playing the organ. I have come into the room many nights while you played, and you have been too absorbed to hear me. I have heard you talk to yourself as though there were another person present. We shall be more cheerful.

Anthony comes to-morrow. He will want better roses than those," she said, touching a suddenly ashen cheek.

"Please, may I have the books?" said Désirée for the third time: and now her voice was like a wail.

"He will never bring her back from the honey-moon," said the woman, as she went up the stairs to her own apartment. "Yet, a few months ago I thought she had taken a new lease of life."

She returned quickly with the books and the portfolio. There were two small volumes bound in calf, and the portfolio was a thin one containing some half-dozen water-colour sketches.

"You will have the candles?"

"I can see by the fire-light," said the child, taking the things into her shaking arms and going toward the hearth.

Mrs. Devereux looked back as she left the room, and saw her place the books on a *prie-dieu* chair, the portfolio beyond them, and kneel down on the hearth. She stood a second and noticed how eagerly the slender fingers began turning the pages.

"She is in a fever," she said to herself. "I wish the wedding was over."

An hour or two later, the persistent screaming of the parrot at last found an entry to her absorption.

"The wretch's neck ought to be wrung!" she said, angrily, as she went down the corridor to the book-room.

The parrot was flying about, screaming. The room was dark except for the merest glimmer from the grate.

"Désirée!" she called; but there was no answer.

In sudden terror she went to the fire and poked the embers into a feeble blaze. There was Désirée, lying on the *prie-dieu* chair, her face down on something.

"She is asleep, or she has fainted," said the woman, shaking her. "Désirée! Désirée!"

But Désirée had travelled beyond the sound of her voice. Her little, thin, childish arms had grown rigid over the sketch she held to her breast—the portrait of a young man of great nobility and softness of aspect, spirit and fire and gaiety all blent in his charming face. His brown locks fell over a snuff-brown coat. He wore a green cravat.

Alas, that all that beauty and bravery, that immortal wit and tenderness, had been dust and ashes for three-and-thirty years!





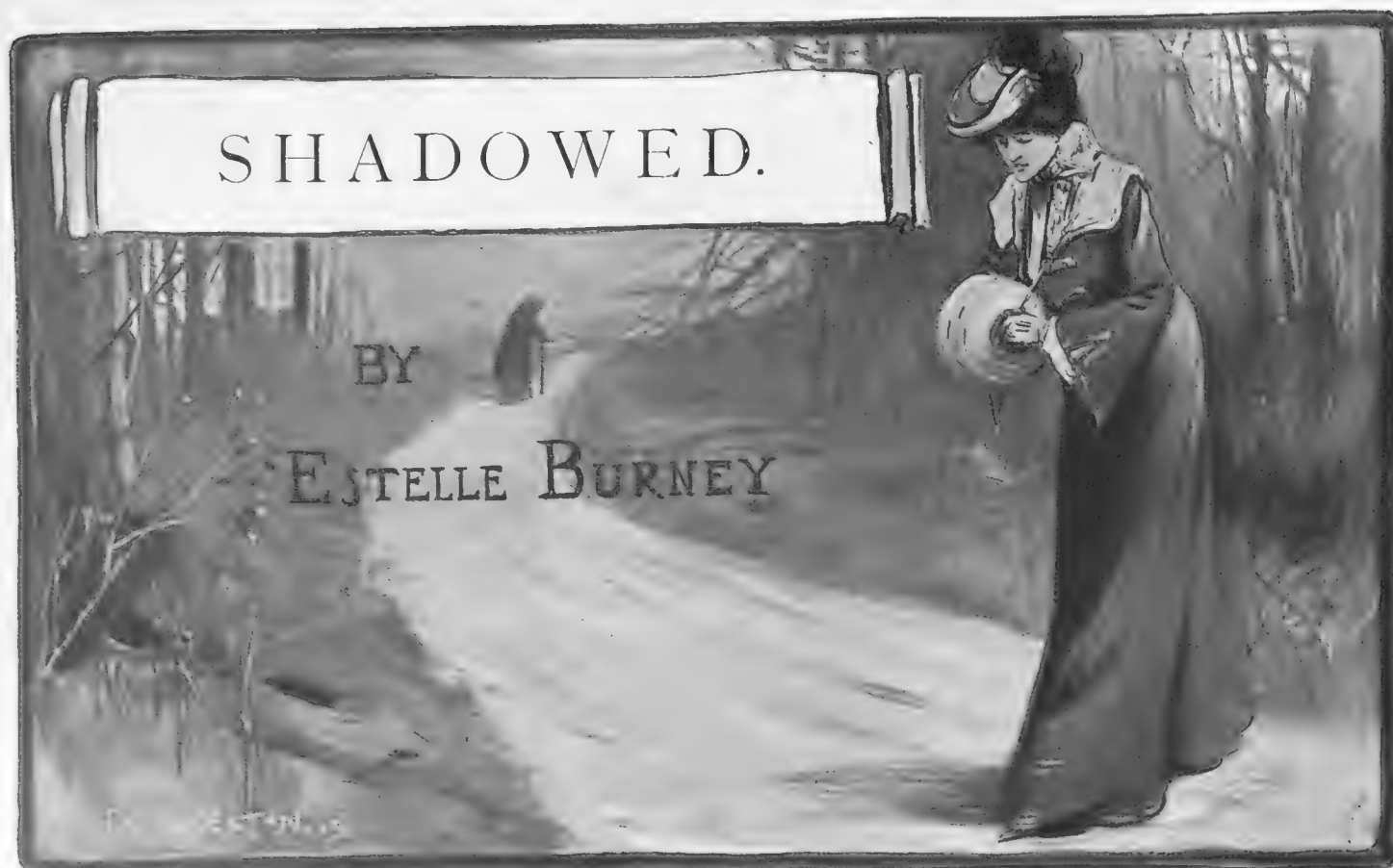
THE LANGUAGE OF LOVE.

HE: Ha! Ha!

SHE: He! He! He!

DRAWN BY TOM BROWNE.





Illustrated by J. R. SKELTON.

CHRISTINA HARLEY, swinging along with the easy grace characteristic of latter-day athletic young womanhood, breed in every line of the sinuous figure that carried its five foot eight inches, from the crown of the shapely brown head to the perfectly fitting but workmanlike country boots, as one born of a ruling race, gave no outward or visible sign of the mental preoccupation that consumed her. With no better-established claim to beauty than that indefinable charm of fair, fresh purity inherent, one would fain believe, to the English maiden, and just touched in this case with the English pride that lends a reticence to curving lips, Christina's clear, colourless skin was as free from trace of emotion as her wide-open grey eyes were guileless of any hint of the refractory sum of arithmetic she was engaged upon.

Let her count up her resources as carefully as she might, they refused to stretch themselves to the measure of her requirements, and, if Miss Harley could recall no period of her life that had not been darkened by the chronic want of money, a new bitterness, she felt, was added to the experience of to-day, since her very hope of the future—a hope still shadowy, but so glorious in its dim outline that she hardly dared, as yet, even name it to herself—was actually threatened by her lack, at this particular juncture, of a few miserable golden sovereigns.

Was it worth while being connected with two great ducal houses and more or less allied to half the Peerage? reflected poor Christina, as she conjured up for herself a picture of the helpless bewilderment with which her father, Lord Rupert Harley (a gentleman whose only acknowledgeable address was a good Club, and whose only assets were represented by judicious whist, a tip here and there from a City friend, and free dinners among a vast circle of relatives and acquaintances), would receive a request for money. His daughter was actually indebted for a home to a spinster aunt supporting the family dignity on limited means in a Bournemouth villa, from which safe but somewhat dull shelter Miss Harley occasionally took wing on a visit to more prosperous kinsfolk. And it was during her present stay at their Sussex seat with the Duke and Duchess of Lomax that Christina had met Colonel Masters and had begun to dream of a way of escape from out her life of dependence. For that this grave, distinguished soldier, whose fame was on all men's lips, had singled her out for marked attention was apparent from the first evening of her arrival, when she had found in the great man her allotted neighbour at the dinner-table—until it had culminated, this very afternoon, in the invitation the receipt of which was filling her at once with delighted

surprise and much misgiving. It was plain that for Mrs. Sylvestre, Colonel Masters's married sister, to ask Christina Harley, whom she scarcely knew, up to her place in Yorkshire, whither the Colonel himself was shortly bound, the inspiration could have come only from him. But how, queried the girl of herself, was she to get up to Yorkshire—all her worldly belongings, for the moment, being covered by her return-ticket to Bournemouth and twelve and sixpence, or thereabouts, in loose cash? Why, the very fare was beyond her means, and she would require at least a couple of new frocks.

The thought brought despair in its train, and Miss Harley, deciding that the country lane where she had sought refuge in a sharp walk held no solution of her difficulties, was turning her face homewards when a glitter in the path attracted her attention, and, stooping, she picked up a ring. What a ring! To the most inexperienced eye, the square-cut ruby surrounded by diamonds in its old-fashioned setting represented a small fortune, and Christina immediately wondered what price Mr. Bernstein would put on it—the little German Jew whom her thoughtful relatives invariably asked to meet her, and whose palatial residence in Park Lane had, at times, it must be confessed, suggested itself to her in the light of a possible alternative to Bournemouth.

As Mr. Bernstein's particular talent lay in the valuation of precious stones, this find of hers, thought Christina, was an opportunity for him, unless he had already affixed a price to it, for it would surely prove to be the property of one among the guests now assembled at the Priory, and it was this gentleman's pastime to tot up the cost to a fraction of the jewels worn by the feminine members of the house-party.

Who would claim the ring? It had been dropped, no doubt, earlier on in the day, as they—the ladies, Christina one of them—returned from taking lunch with the shooters, and it was altogether unlikely, argued the girl, that anyone had passed the spot since.

Not a soul in sight; but, stay—yes, one figure, some fifty yards or so on ahead: a woman, an old beggar-woman to all appearances, a mere, shapeless mass of rags, crowned with an amazing straw-hat, and Christina could recall having crossed that hat on her way up the road some ten minutes or a quarter of an hour ago.

The poor creature, to whom sixpence would have represented wealth, must have trodden the ring underfoot without seeing it, as Christina herself had done on her outward journey. She was retracing her footsteps when the glitter of the jewel caught her eye. But the dwindling shape in the distance shuffled its way on, unconscious of having been saved from a terrible temptation, and Miss Harley, slipping the ring into the bosom of her dress, made the rest of her

journey at a run, and within a few moments was safe at the Priory, where, in the Central Hall, tea was being dispensed.

She was met by a chorus of inquiry as to what she had been doing with herself, and instantly realised how free from any excitement or disturbance was the peaceful, tea-scented atmosphere into which she had entered. The entire house-party was assembled, and the men and women grouped about the hearth were engaged, as chance would have it, in an animated discussion upon jewels.

Christina held her breath as one woman after another gave up her rings to Mr. Bernstein (who formed the Court of Appeal and discoursed learnedly on settings ancient and modern) for closer inspection, putting forward what there might be of legend and history attached to the gem.

The interest was general, the Duchess even sending for some curious specimens from her jewel-case, and Christina waited, feeling sure that any woman possessed of such a treasure as she had just found must now become aware of her loss. But no claim was made, no alarm arose, and clearly the ring did not belong to any one of the Priory guests.

To whom, then, did it belong? wondered Christina, when, later, in the privacy of her bedroom, she gazed long into the fiery heart of the ruby and strove to pluck out its mystery. Who had dropped it by that roadside? Could it have lain there unnoticed for days, months, perhaps years? And, the problem proving insoluble, Miss Harley presumably put it to one side that she might leave her mind free to deal with Mrs. Sylvestre's invitation.

For to have picked up a costly trinket, keeping the adventure strictly to herself, could not, one would imagine, have much improved her circumstances. Yet, on the dispersal of the Priory party some two days afterwards, it was understood that Colonel Masters, who was to escort a niece North in the following week, would have the pleasure of making himself responsible at the same time for Miss Harley's safe conduct and of introducing that young lady into his sister's home.

And having journeyed up from Sussex in Christina's company, the gallant Colonel fixed the hour for their meeting at King's Cross on the Monday eight days following, Christina, meanwhile, being bound for Bournemouth; but on the pretext of shopping she refused, and to his unconcealed chagrin, her companion's further offer to see her across to Waterloo, and, bidding him adieu in Victoria Street, drove away, conscious as she took her last look of him that her fate was trembling in the balance. His return to India, where he held an important appointment, was imminent, and the next fortnight would decide whether he asked her to accompany him or left England for years, wishing, perhaps, that he had had the chance of seeing something more of the girl who had caught his passing fancy, but soon cured of idle regrets in the change of scene and circumstance. And let it be said at once in this girl's defence that her heart and not her vanity was touched. It was a triumph, no doubt, to have made an impression on the unimpressible Colonel Masters, who had hitherto proved the very despair of match-making mothers (and he had left his fortieth birthday some eighteen months in the rear);

but life had treated Christina so far unkindly that she was appreciative beyond her years of the sterling worth, the grand dignity of character, and the simplicity withal that had gone into the making of her hero. What an anchorage here offered for her against the storms and buffets of capricious fortune, and where in the balance were Julius Bernstein's mere money-bags? She must be given her chance: it was but justice that she should have it. Indeed, she would take it, resolved the girl, with set lips, as she paid off her cab, having previously disposed of her luggage in the Waterloo cloak-room, and realised that she had now some six shillings left out of her scanty store. Whereupon, disdaining the humble 'bus, she steadily tramped her way *viâ* Whitehall and the Haymarket to Bond Street, her destination, it soon appeared, a famous jeweller's shop in that "Arabian Nights" street of famous jewels.

Her errand was a doubtful one, but the girl knew what she was doing as she turned into the glittering establishment, and, with quiet confidence, asked to see Mr. Gunn, who received her immediately within the favoured seclusion of his private sanctum, and inquired after the health of her father and family with the privileged air of an old friend. For it was a tradition with the Gunns to serve the house of Harley, the members of which, and for generations past, had left many a record of their transactions with the firm on its books. Even Christina herself, as appeared, was no stranger at No. 300, Old Bond Street, where she had disposed, a year or so back, during her first Season, of a few girlish trinkets, the legacy of a dead godmother, the sale thereof usefully contributing to the purchase of a presentation-gown and the rest of her *débutante's* outfit.

To-day, her destiny leading her, she found herself in the presence of Mr. Gunn senior, his son, the active head of the firm, having, unfortunately, been called away on business. For Christina remained convinced to the last hour of her life that she had sought out Mr. Maurice Gunn that morning



"Family heirloom, of course; very sad, very sad!" he muttered.

intending to tell him the truth and boldly ask him to come to her assistance, her idea being that he should lend her fifteen or twenty pounds on the ring while he investigated the question of its ownership. Obviously, were no one to lay claim to it, Christina might consider the treasure-trove her own. But every attempt at explanation was labour thrown away on the genial but enfeebled and very deaf old gentleman, who was prepared to entertain his visitor with interesting anecdotes relating to her grandfather, and who, at the first sight of the ring, felt sure that he knew all about it.

"Family heirloom, of course; very sad, very sad!" he muttered, paying no heed at all to the halting story Christina tried to tell. Buy it? Of course, he would buy it, his only regret that Miss Harley should be under the necessity of parting with it. How much could he oblige her with? Five hundred pounds. The ring was worth every penny of it.

Christina, however, made it plain that such a sum of money surpassed all her anticipations and even her desires, and they finally compromised at a hundred guineas, Mr. Gunn delicately hinting that when Miss Harley should be in a position to reclaim her property she



should have it. "And without a sixpence of interest charged, my dear," added the old gentleman, with a paternal smile and a kindly hand-shake.

And Christina, notes and gold hidden about her person, made her way back into the streets that looked to her for the moment as unfamiliar as those of a dream city. So strong on the girl was the novel sense of her wealth and so incredible the weight of her fairy gold that it turned the world around her into an unreality—a state of mind to which may have been attributable the sudden illusion of a figure at her elbow that possessed Christina. Who was it that crossed in front of her at Conduit Street? A woman in rags—a beggar-woman seen once before through the dusk of a winter's evening in Sussex. Good God! How came that woman to be here? But in a flash she was lost in the crowd, and Christina, her heart beating to suffocation, shook herself free of this nightmare (for such it must have been) born of a guilty conscience, and, the first step on her downward journey being safely accomplished, gave her attention to the January sales that were now on.

She needed many additions to her wardrobe. Dear me, when she came to think of it, what was there she did not need? And in and out, all day long, she tripped from one West-End emporium to another—buying, buying, buying in a very frenzy of reckless extravagance. Silken hose and dainty kerchief, cosy wrapper and twinkling shoes, hats and boas, gay ribbons and delicate laces, a pair of the silver-backed hair-brushes she had never hoped to attain this side of the grave; and, after the purchase of a modest tweed costume or so (for her good taste did not desert her), she treated herself to the crowning joy of a gown all soft and white and pure that she would wear with lilies at her heart at the York County Ball, when, perhaps—who could tell what might happen? But at this point she broke off her speculations on the future, and likewise decided that the moment had come to close her accounts, for a very considerable hole had been made in Miss Harley's fortune by the time she caught that afternoon's express to Bournemouth, though one must in justice add that it was a perfectly equipped young lady who, some few days later, having gathered up her purchases on her way through town, met Colonel Masters and his niece at King's Cross, and in their company journeyed Northwards, where the very happiest week her life ever knew began for Christina.

Uneasy conscience might refuse to be altogether silenced, but with stern determination Miss Harley accepted the consequences of her deed. She had grasped her opportunity with firm hands, and the end justified the means, she told herself, when, on the morrow of the York Ball, she awoke the affianced bride of Colonel Masters.

He loved her, no doubt, and if she had played Providence to his hesitating mood he would never know it and was already more than half convinced that he had sought her out and carried the whole business through for himself.

Of such, reflected Christina, is the quality of masculine ignorance; nor did she forget the share due in her success to that enchanting snow-white frock. He would have said that he liked her just as well in her old black gown—that is the sort of thing a man always does say, while the woman who listens smiles superior and refrains, in her wisdom, from argument.

The engagement was not yet made public, and Christina, in her secret joy, held herself a little aloof from the rest of the ladies of the party on the day following upon that eventful evening, and, as the afternoon closed in, made her way through the silent gardens, hushed in their winter sleep, towards the still more deserted park, where presently, as she knew by the sound of the rapidly approaching shots, the guns would pass, homeward bound. And, wrapped in her love-dream, the girl paced on, till a whine in her ear startled her into the consciousness that she was followed.

"See what I have found!" said a woman's voice, as a dirty hand, thrust forward simultaneously, held out for Christina's inspection an exquisite little watch, enamelled and diamond-studded.

"I wonder, now, if Missy could dispose of this watch where she sold the ring, and spare a bit this time to a poor, hard-working woman?" pursued the hag who had stopped her, as the girl stood helpless, stricken dumb and motionless with terror.

"I wouldn't split, not me; and I often find pretty things, I do. Come now, Missy; finding's keeping, ain't it? It's plain you think so," went on the voice, gathering impatience in its raucous tones, as Christina, seemingly turned to stone, stirred neither hand nor foot, unable to face her tormentor or even to utter aloud the prayers with which she besought a pitying Heaven till, at last, it sent deliverance and loosened her feet, so that she fled, panting like a mad thing, on through the darkness to the shelter of the house beyond and the safety of her own room.

It was the woman—the beggar-woman who was in sight when she found the ring, who was in Bond Street when she sold the ring, who

had caught her in some fearful coil, the ropes of which were closing and tightening about her. Oh, if she dared to tell her lover the truth, he would save her! Now was her golden moment, but as her good angel whispered the inspiration she dismissed it. To some other man whose frail human nature might have been nearer her own she could have made her confession. But not to this man. He was too high above her, too strong, too noble; he would never understand nor forgive so mean a pandering with temptation, and, bracing herself to the effort, she dressed and went down to dinner. For rescue was at hand, and within a few weeks, if she chose, she might have placed half the world between herself and her persecutor.

She would choose. Colonel Masters had already found time to suggest that his *fiancée*, foregoing the, to him, doubtful joys of a smart wedding, should agree to marry him quietly within the month, and in her adoption of this course, to which she had at first demurred, Christina now saw salvation.

So it fell out that when her prospective bridegroom, having snatched a private word or two with her on their way to the dining-room, rose, at the close of dinner, to announce his engagement with Miss Harley, he was enabled to add that, all being well, he hoped to take his wife with him on his return to the scene of his duties in the early days of this very New Year.

How could she have hesitated, thought Christina, when security lay for her in this man's keeping? She had sinned for his sake, and, having won him, she would atone for all by the devotion of a lifetime.

What a wife she would be to him—how faithful, how tender, how pliant! Only let her get safely away. India was so delightfully far off, and here danger lurked at every turn. Or was it her excited fancy that saw in the presence at table of a new guest whose name she had not caught something suspicious. For surely that pale-faced man opposite, who must be—though he did not look it—a gentleman, some friend of the Sylvestres, was watching her!

Absurd, impossible; her unstrung nerves were playing her a trick. Oh, for the end of the month, when she would bid adieu to this nameless terror and sail away, a free woman, with the husband of her choice! And, following Mrs. Sylvestre into the hall, she was met by a discreet whisper from the butler—

"A gentleman from London, Miss, to see you on urgent business. He is in the morning-room."

It was Mr. Maurice Gunn. Meanwhile, the ladies having withdrawn, Mr. Sylvestre treated his gentlemen guests to a mild sensation, introducing to them in the person of the hitherto unknown visitor the famous detective, Mr. Daniel Stringer, from Scotland Yard.

"It appears," explained the host to his interested listeners, "that the mystery of a big jewel-theft is about to be solved for us. You will all remember it," he went on, "as the sensation of a Season or two back, when the Countess of Canvey was mulcted of some forty thousand pounds' worth of precious stones at one fell swoop."

Part of the booty was already in the hands of the police, and the thieves, volunteered Mr. Sylvestre in further information, were believed to be in hiding in the neighbourhood—indeed, in the very near neighbourhood of the house.

Mr. Stringer's assistant, masquerading as that gentleman's valet, was studying the situation from the Servants' Hall, and, between the two of them, developments might shortly be looked for.

So that it was from out this atmosphere charged with excitement that Colonel Masters, going in search of a mislaid cigarette-case into the morning-room, presently stumbled upon Miss Harley and Mr. Gunn—the girl, wild-eyed and well-nigh insane with terror, sticking to her story in the face of all evidence and opposing a dogged resistance to every effort of Mr. Gunn's to elicit from her the truth.

"You cannot believe, Miss Harley," reiterated the jeweller, in despair, "that I have rushed up from London to Yorkshire with any other intent than to do you a service?" Would she not have faith in him—give him the history of that ring she had sold his father, and it might yet be not too late to save her?

But his prayers were in vain. The ring was hers, persisted Christina. That it corresponded in minutest detail to part of the lost property of the Countess of Canvey, and was even now in the hands of the authorities at Scotland Yard—though the Gunns had, so far, withheld the information that they would be compelled ultimately to afford as to how it had come into their possession—was nothing.

Christina was too terrified to reason out her position; the ring was hers, the ring was hers, the ring was hers!

"Then that settles it," interposed Colonel Masters, with cheery confidence, upon the main facts of the case being placed before him.

"Miss Harley," he added, gently, persuaded that the girl's distress arose from this exposure of her financial embarrassments, "will have no need in future to sell her jewels, but we shall not funk a prosecution, and I shall be beside Mrs. Masters when



*"I wonder, now, if Missy could dispose of this watch where she sold the ring, and spare a bit this time to a poor, hard-working woman?" pursued the hag who had stopped her.*

"SHADOWED" (SEE PAGE 44.)



the time comes for her to prove, as you may rely upon it that she will prove, that the ring was hers."

And what could Mr. Gunn do but bow himself out of the house, touched to compassion by this spectacle of a brave man's simple faith in the girl he loved—a faith that remained unshaken throughout the weeks that followed?

For while the whole world knew the truth—knew, too, that the Gunns were moving heaven and earth to stop a prosecution, counting no sacrifice of time or money too great to save the family whose honour they held as dear as their own—Colonel Masters was engaging counsel for his future wife's defence, and hurrying on the preparations for his wedding, and importuning the War Office for an extension of his leave, all with the most admirable serenity and perfect confidence in Miss Harley's story—he the one person in London who believed in it. And none dared lift the veil from his eyes, a great pity for the honest soldier, a pity that embraced in its charity the unhappy girl, stirring all hearts.

As for Christina, stiffened to a rigid purpose, she saw only the goal she had set out to reach. She would be this man's wife, and then let the deluge come; nor did her courage fail her until, on the very eve of her marriage, she learnt that the threatened danger had passed away.

"They have withdrawn the prosecution," announced Colonel Masters to his *fiancée*, his bewilderment tinged with annoyance lest so tame a conclusion to the case should reflect upon Miss Harley.

But Christina was conquered. Reckless in pursuit, the woman in her now shrank from grasping at the prize that had tempted her to her ruin, and, in a passion of tardy remorse, she sobbed out her confession and penitence.

"I did it to win your love, and I have lost you," was the burden of her cry. For she was resolute, fiercely resolute, that he should not marry her.

She was not worth it. She never had been worth such a man as he, and now that the whole world knew of her worthlessness she would spare him such a wife. It was the one thing left her that in her love she could do for him. And she did it. And when it became known that the marriage of Colonel Masters and Miss Harley, at first postponed, would not take place, for the sufficient reason that the bride-elect had eloped with Mr. Julius Bernstein, Society, having chattered itself hoarse for three entire days over the folly of a girl who could jilt such a man as Masters for a mere millionaire, crystallised its verdict into one contemptuous query

For what else, asked one worldling of another, could be expected of a Harley?



NURSE: What are you doing with that spade, Master Tommy?  
TOMMY: Going to find another present for Papa.

DRAWN BY GUNNING KING.

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# HEART OF GOLD

BY MYRA HAMILTON  
ILLUSTRATED BY A. E. JACKSON



appeared most thoughtful, and when the time came for her to make her pilgrimage to the well in the Garden of Roses she declared her intention of going alone, and would not allow even her favourite Lady-in-Waiting to accompany her.

"None shall hear my request," she said, "lest the Frog should fail to comply with it and thus make me the laughing-stock of all." So by herself the Princess hurried swiftly along the path, and though her beautiful robes became entangled with the rose-bushes as she went along, she never heeded them, so great was her desire to reach the well. When she did so, she

THE old King lay dying, and, as his courtiers watched around his bedside, they saw from the expression upon his face that he was desirous of saying something, so the Lord Chamberlain bent over the monarch to listen to his request.

"My child!" gasped His Majesty. "Bid her come to me."

And when the Princess entered the room, the King seemed more content, and lay peacefully with his hand in hers for a few moments; but soon he attempted to speak again.

"I am leaving you, my daughter," he said, "at a time when it is necessary for you to have guidance and care; but though I fear I have petted and spoiled you greatly all your life, there is one thing I must tell you for your safeguard. Upon your twentieth birthday you will be entitled to have one wish granted, if you go to the well in the Garden of Roses and make known your request to the Magic Frog who dwells in the clear water there. Choose with discretion, for it will be useless to try to change it later."

"Only one wish, dear father?" pouted the Princess. "May I not have more?"

But His Majesty shook his head. "No," he said, "you may have only one then; but on your twenty-fifth birthday you are entitled to another, and on the day you reach thirty there is again one waiting for you, which will be the last. But, remember, nothing can alter your wish after it has been uttered, so your future happiness depends entirely upon your choice. Now, dear child, embrace me before you leave. I would rest now, and we may not meet again. Farewell."

After the King was buried, the Princess was very sad for a long while; but as she grew up her youth stirred within her and every day lessened the sorrow she felt, until at last, though never forgetting the dead monarch, she seemed quite content to be alone. But, as the day of her twentieth birthday approached, Her Royal Highness

looked cautiously over her shoulder, to make sure there were no listeners, and then she placed her two hands on the edge and softly called over.

"Frog! Frog!" she cried. "Are you there? I am the Princess who is entitled to claim one wish which you have promised to grant." And from the depth of the well came a voice which made the damsel shudder as she heard.



"Frog! Frog!" she cried. "Are you there?"



"Tell me what you desire," it said, "so you can then leave me in peace. The sooner you are gone the better pleased I shall be. Now, what do you ask?"

"Beauty!" cried the Princess. "Give me beauty so wondrous that all men will look and marvel and, above all, love!"

From the well there came the sound of splashing and scraping, and at last, very much out of breath with his effort, the Magic Frog clambered to the surface, balancing upon his head, while he found a foothold among the brickwork, a little vessel of pure gold.

Her Royal Highness started back in dismay, but, with slow and awkward step, the Frog approached her, as she stood white and trembling at the ugliness of the thing she had lured from its hiding-place.

"Do not fear me," grunted the Frog; "I shall not harm you. Indeed, the sooner I am back in the darkness of the well the better pleased I shall be.

But," he went on, lifting the little basin from his head and holding it out to her, "dip your face three times in this bowl of magic water and the beauty you crave for shall be yours. Come! It is neither too hot nor too cold, so why do you hang back and tremble?"

Nervously the royal damsel obeyed, and, plunging her face into the basin, she quickly withdrew it with a little gasp.

"Once!" counted the Frog. "Now, again. Twice! That is well. Only once more, and then we need not meet for another five years. Three times! Excellent! Princess, your wish is granted."

Shaking in every limb, Her Royal Highness ran back to the Palace, feeling she should never rest until she was once more among her

maidens, to whom, however, she determined to say nothing; but when they all looked at their mistress their cries of astonishment told the truth to the Princess.

"Am I beautiful?" she asked them eagerly, and when they nodded their heads she laughed with joy. "You are more beautiful than the dawn on a summer's morn," they told her. "Your eyes are as clear as the blue of the Southern Sea, while your skin is whiter than the driven snow, and your hair glitters in the sunlight like gold of great value. Alack! how the hearts of men will become stirred as they gaze upon such loveliness!"

But though the Princess had become such a vision of beauty, her character had not improved. She seemed to delight in causing pain, and, as the rumour of her charms spread over the country and many sought to woo her, she spurned every suitor and laughed when they spoke of their love. From afar came a Prince, who in eloquent words spoke of his admiration and affection; but she would not listen and tried to dismiss him as she had the others. But he refused to

be driven away, and, renouncing his kingdom, he dwelt among her people just outside the Palace gates, determined to wait patiently until her heart should soften and she was prepared to accept his devotion. But the passing of each year found Her Royal Highness a little more selfish and inconsiderate for the feelings of others, and, as the fifth year approached, much curiosity was shown as to the nature of the second wish the Princess would utter. Like the first time, she went alone to the well in the Garden of Roses, for she dreaded that anybody should know her secret, and her pretty face looked prettier than ever in her excitement as she bent over the water and mentioned her request. This time she was in too great a hurry to call to the Frog first, so she swiftly made known her wants, just as though the time were very short and she had not her lifetime before her.

"Give me Wealth!" she cried; "great wealth, so I may deck myself in jewels. What is the good of beauty alone? Frog! Frog!

Do you hear? I want money!"

And again the Magic Frog toiled painfully up from the bottom of the well; but this time he bore in his mouth a great gold purse, which he handed to the impatient Princess, who could hardly wait to thank him, so eager was she to obtain possession of the money she longed for.

"That purse will never be empty," the Frog told her. "You may spend as much as you like and yet the contents will remain the same. But are you wise to make such a choice, do you think? I can give you far better things than money."

The beautiful Princess shook her head incredulously, and, grasping the purse firmly, proceeded to return to the Palace; but just before she left the Rose Garden she

stopped and looked back, and there, to her surprise, stood the Frog on the same spot, gazing after her with an expression of sadness upon his ugly face.

"How silly he is!" she muttered crossly to herself. "Why, I now have the two finest things the world contains—Beauty and Wealth."

When the people heard the nature of the Princess's second request, they, too, were overjoyed, and went about saying, "No longer shall we be neglected and allowed to starve, for our Princess has asked for riches. We know she will help us, as her father would have done. She has not thought of our poverty for so long, but it is not too late even now to bring sunshine into our lives."

And the Prince who lived without the Palace gates, patiently waiting until the heart of his beloved should soften, rejoiced too, for well he knew the suffering among her subjects, and longed for her to alleviate it.

But these hopes proved to be without foundation, for still Her Royal Highness thought only of herself and her pleasure. She



*The Prince who lived without the Palace gates.*

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spent her money on priceless jewels, costly furs and raiment, and, as she swept through the city with her wonderful carriages and horses, the people crept from their tumbledown dwelling-houses and shook their fists at her. "There she goes—Heart of Stone!" they cried. "Will nothing soften her before we starve outside her gates? For shame!"

And when the Prince heard the name the people gave her, he felt well-nigh despairing of any change taking place; for daily she drove past him on her way to balls and banquets held at distant castles, and the only time she seemed to be aware of her subjects was when, by obstructing the road, her horses had to be checked, and then she would glance from her carriage, her beautiful face disfigured by a frown, and the people—after crying bitterly, "Heart of Stone!"—would go their ways unheeded. With the winter there came famine to distress the people still more, and in the intense cold many died in abject misery, which was lessened, however, by the gentleness which the Prince who dwelt among them displayed; but still Her Royal Highness went her own way, though now a little cloud often appeared upon her face, and she rarely drove through the city, for she was beginning to feel the abhorrence which the people had for her.

So passed the time until the winter gave place to the spring, and the spring to the summer in which the Princess was to claim her third wish. And, as Her Royal Highness walked along the Rose Garden to the well, she was very thoughtful, for at last she realised how useless her beauty and riches had been, and she felt she would give it all up if only her people would look and speak kindly to her, for she understood at last how well she deserved the hatred they never troubled to conceal.

"Oh, Frog! Frog!" she cried, earnestly, and her tears splashed into the well as she spoke. "Grant me the love of my people! That is what I ask now, for I know it is the best thing in the world."

But not a sound came from the well, and, after waiting in vain, she called once more. "It is I, the Princess, who speak," she said. "Give me the love of my people!"

Slowly the Frog appeared, but he came from the well empty-handed, and, when he saw the tears in the Princess's eyes, he shook his head sorrowfully.

"I can do nothing for you. I cannot grant that request. It is not in my power, for the secret lies with you, Heart of Stone!"

Then Her Royal Highness burst into sobs, for she hated the title she knew she had earned, and she besought the Magic Frog to help her change it; but he told her he was powerless, and then he watched her walk sorrowfully away, her head bowed in thought.

Into the city, in time, there came a rumour of deeds of kindness and generosity which were performed by stealth to relieve the oppression of the people, who, one with another, wondered who their good friend could be.

"It is not Heart of Stone!" they cried, contemptuously. "She does not care for us. We may die at her door as long as she is happy. It must be the Prince who still aids us secretly as well as openly. Bless him!"

And in time a raging fever swept the city nearly bare of its inhabitants, but those who survived had strange tales to tell of gifts of clothes, good food, and money which appeared mysteriously at their doors. Soon, however, one topic alone was spoken of, and many were the cries of despair that rose from the aching hearts of the Princess's subjects, for the Prince, beloved of all, had caught the fever and was a-dying. He lay in his little hut, parched with thirst as the cruel heat burned in his blood; but suddenly to his bedside came a strange, veiled lady, who nursed him as though he were her own son, and, by her skill and care, fought with him the way back to life. Occasionally she left him to minister to another, and in her absence her place would be filled by one of the people, who would speak with hushed breath of the good deeds the stranger did. And directly the Prince had the strength, he stretched out his hand and drew the unknown lady near him.

"You have saved my life as well as the lives of many others," he said, wistfully. "I have learnt all I owe to your kindness. Won't you tell me whom we have to thank?"

Slowly the veil was lifted, and the Prince looked upon the face he had always held above all others dear; but now it was changed, for the beauty had faded, the gold had vanished from the hair, and little lines and wrinkles marred its perfection.

"The Princess!" he cried. "It is you who have been so good to us all this time!"

"Not Princess," she said, correcting him sadly. "You forget the name which I have earned among my people—Heart of Stone."

"Not now," he rejoined, as he softly kissed her tears away. "Long ago we spoke of you by another name, and one, my darling, you richly deserve."

"Tell me what it is?" she asked; and when he did so she blushed from sheer delight and bowed her head in thankfulness.

"The people call you Heart of Gold," he whispered; "and even when you are my wife it will be the same. Dear little Heart of Gold, I love you!"





## THE ROMANTIC BUTCHER-BOY.

By PERCY GREENBANK.

Illustrated by JOHN HASSALL.



Now Sarah was a Servant, somewhat middle-aged and fat.

I.  
Young Peter was a butcher-boy—as promising a lad  
As ever carried cutlets down the street.  
A rather more than average intelligence he had;  
In fact, he was a connoisseur of meat.  
He knew the name of every joint that one can call to mind,  
The silverside, the brisket, or the rump;  
He'd tell New Zealand mutton from the ordinary kind,  
And never took a loin chop for a chump.

II.  
Now Sarah was a servant, somewhat middle-aged and fat,  
A steady, sober character she bore;  
She lived as sole domestic with a couple in a flat,  
High up, about the sixth or seventh floor.  
Of course, she felt shut off from all the busy world below—  
In Sarah's lute this was the only rift—  
The tradesmen had to whistle through a speaking-tube, you  
know,  
And send up the provisions in a lift.

III.  
Young Peter used to come and call for orders day by day,  
In every sort of weather, wet or fine;  
And soon he grew to fancy, in a fond and foolish way,  
This servant-girl at Number Twenty-nine.  
It was not Sarah's form or face that influenced his choice  
(He never had set eyes on her, I fear),  
He somehow was attracted by the rather Cockney voice  
Which breathed the daily orders in his ear.



He somehow was attracted by the rather Cockney voice.

IV.  
Though painfully prosaic were the sentiments exchanged  
"Twixt Peter and the charmer up aloft,  
His mental equilibrium could quickly be deranged  
By "Half-a-pound of suet!" whispered soft.  
Sweet, flowery ideas he seemed to gather by the bunch,  
And wildly did his heart go pit-a-pat  
To hear that "Missis wants them cutlets sent in time for lunch,  
And please remember just to trim the fat!"

V.  
Now Peter longed to win her, but he never got a chance,  
Yet every day he loved her more and more.  
He read some books to satisfy his cravings for romance,  
And steeped himself in mediæval lore.  
He dreamt he was a gallant knight, decked out in trappings gay,  
While Sarah was a maid of high degree;  
And next time that she shouted down, "No orders for to-day!"  
He whispered back, "Ah, fair one, fly with me!"

VI.  
Then Sarah giggled loudly, crying, "What's your little game?"  
And Peter most precipitately fled;  
But on the morrow he returned, and said, "My heart's aflame!"  
And Sarah blushed an unbecoming red.  
And every day throughout that week, and also through the next,  
He wooed her with original remarks;  
But she was unresponsive and it only made her vexed—  
She cautioned him to "stop his silly larks."

VII.  
Now while his fond attentions she endeavoured to ignore,  
Her mistress one fine day began to scold;  
She put the blame on Sarah, just because, the night before,  
The joint was underdone and rather cold.  
But Sarah had a temper, and she sucked in fashion glum,  
Till by-and-by the whistle sounded shrill.  
When Peter through the speaking-tube cried, "Maiden, wilt thou come?"  
Well, Sarah, in a passion, said "I will!"

VIII.  
A happy lad was Peter then, to think he could persuade  
This fascinating female to elope.  
He knew that in the olden days a true and loving maid  
Was generally rescued by a rope;  
But when there are no mediæval imp'ements at hand,  
With modern ones you must, of course, make shift,  
And very simple was the scheme that cunning Peter planned—  
He hauled down Sarah in the tradesmen's lift.

IX.  
I fear he was a trifle disappointed in her looks,  
When, somewhat squeezed, his charmer came to ground;  
But chivalry and honour he had read about in books,  
And so, of course, he felt in duty bound.  
And first of all he kissed and then he carried off his love,  
Although of some considerable weight,  
While Sarah's mistress waited in the little flat above,  
And wondered why the luncheon was so late.

THE END.



Her Mistress one fine day began to scold.



He hauled down Sarah in the Tradesmen's Lift.

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## PAMELA'S ADVENTURE.

BY CONSTANCE BEERBOHM.

THE DOWAGER DUCHESS OF SHETLAND, aged 78. *Her friend, THE HON. MARY MELSOM, aged 72. 200, Belgrave Square. Tea-time.*

"I'M a garrulous old person, they say, yet everybody encourages me to chatter, all the same. What was it you asked me just now? Ah, I remember! . . . You asked me, my dear, to tell you about my grandsons and grand-daughters. I only wish I could tell you more to their advantage! For my part, I find it difficult to reconcile myself to the manners of to-day. When we were girls, good Heavens! what would the dear old Duke have said to us if we had mimicked him to his face? Yet I saw Pamela and Constance and George taking off Shetland, their own father, before his very eyes the other day, don't you know: the irascible way he has of giving orders to his man—swear-words interspersed—and his odd laugh when he hasn't seen a joke. I confess they did it to the life, and I couldn't help chuckling, which enraged poor Shetland far more, by the way, than the girls' imitation of him! . . . Yes, I do think that some disaster will happen to England if the girls and boys don't mend their ways. The girls growing so tall, and the boys so short. That means deterioration of the race, to begin with. Then, don't the girls seem masterful—giving their orders right and left, leaving the men far behind, and in their own fields, too? As to pluck, it seems to me the girls will go to battle soon, whilst the men stay at home smelling their scent-bottles and with their pretty things about them. . . . The Boer War, you say, after all, showed Englishmen were just as brave and strong as ever? Well, of course, there *was* the Boer War; and I don't forget that George Shetland's youngest boy came home covered with glory—recommended for the 'V.C.' and looking 'fit,' as Pamela said, and quite 'too deevy.' I didn't like to ask what 'deevy' meant. These girls talk such slang. They use such inapt expressions, too. When Connie met Lord Kitchener for the first time, at the 'F.O.' you remember, she came home and said he was 'a Lamb—a Perfect Lamb.' How anyone could call Kitchener a Lamb!

"Here comes the tea! You like yours without sugar. Now, I still take sugar. The dear old Queen once said to me, 'How these modern women drink their tea without sugar I cannot imagine.' The Queen herself was even fond of *eau sucrée*, and would often call for a glass—she found it soothing to the nerves. But, you see, she was of German extraction, and the Germans love *eau sucrée*. Another of her pet objections was to Ladies' Clubs. You know, two of her daughters and her favourite grand-daughter belonged to a West-End Club, and would often lunch and dine there. Even her great-granddaughters joined them sometimes. The dear Queen was really horrified, and declared she could not understand how women with a home wanted a Club besides. . . . But how I wander from the point! You asked for tales of my grandchildren—Pamela and Connie and the rest—and it flashed through my mind as I was talking that you might be amused to hear of a little adventure of Pamela's. No more tea? Well, then, now for Pamela's adventure!

"Pamela will be twenty this month. She got herself engaged just two years later than her mother and I did before her. Next month she will be married. Dear little Pamela, Marchioness of Portrush! And what a pretty Marchioness she will be, too! Fond of the Marquis? She does not show her affection: in fact, rather snubs him in public; but Connie—Connie is a year younger—tells me that in private she speaks of him as 'a Lamb'; so I hope all is well. He, Toddy, the Marquis, don't you know, is a good-natured youth, not overburdened with brains, but thinks the whole world of Pamela. What should bring them together puzzled most people in the beginning. When they met at balls they talked without ceasing. They exchanged letters every day. My daughter Jane—Pamela's mother, as you know—often asked me what I imagined they could find time to write about. Her girls never confide in her as she did in me at the same age, and I think that sometimes my dear Jane feels just a little pained. All of a sudden, Pamela announces her engagement with Portrush, first to Shetland, and then to her mother.

Shetland appeared pleased, but Jane was rather dismayed. Portrush is a good, harmless youth, but Jane objects to his having no brains—to speak of. 'Never mind, Mamma,' said Pamela, when she saw the tears standing in her mother's eyes; 'Toddy isn't likely to distinguish himself in the House, or to write a book; but I admire him. He's such a plucky soldier and sportsman and the rest. Besides which, you know our bond—the one great bond between us.' 'Your one great bond?' asked Jane, feeling she was now coming to the point; 'what is it?' 'Why, Mamma,' answered Pamela, 'I thought you knew our bond was Chinese Spaniels.' Now Jane did know that Pamela was a member of the Ladies' Kennel Club, and for a year past had made herself almost ridiculous over Toy Pomeranians. Actually that girl devoted all the money she had won at Bridge when staying at Talksworth—and which amounted to two hundred pounds—to buying a couple of Toy Poms. They were called 'Hyacinth' colour—why, I could never make out. It even irritated Shetland, fond as he is of his girl, that she should spend her money on two such little yapping beasts. Pamela spoke of them as her 'lion-hearted ducks,' because one of them bit Shetland's man in the leg and the other tore my new gloves to shreds!—but that is neither here nor there. Anyhow, Jane did not know that the great bond between her girl and Portrush had been Chinese Spaniels, and she asked to be enlightened. Pamela explained that Chinese Spaniels were to be the dogs of the day. 'King Charles's were nowhere, or would be nowhere. Indeed, there were only two of the Chinese pets in London. French soldiers at Peking had happened on two or three at the Palace, which had been reserved for the Emperor and Empress of China. They—the French soldiers—conveyed the spaniels to Paris, where they soon became the rage.' Pamela spoke with sparkling eyes and told Jane that any woman in London would give her head to have one. Indeed, the child had even then entertained secret longings to sell the pearls, which Shetland had given her on the day she was presented, to buy the only dog of the breed to be had, of a dealer of whom she had, somehow, heard. At length, she confided her secret at a dance to Portrush. It seems he was as keen on the 'Sleeve Dog'—that is what they call the little Chinese brutes—as Pamela herself, so they talked of nothing else. That dog, hidden away at the dealer's, became their bond.

"One day, Pamela stole out of the house, unbeknown to anyone. The dealer lived in a purlieu of Mayfair, and Pamela did not wish to be seen, very naturally. How she slipped into Piccadilly unnoticed, even by her maid, Jane cannot guess to this day. The dog *was* a little dear, and it captivated Pamela, and such was her desire to possess so unique a treasure that, to make a long story short, my dear, Pamela—our delicate, dainty little Pam—ran into a horrid pawnbroker's one day, and *did* pawn her pearls! She got three hundred pounds for them, and bought the dog, Chin. But what to do with Chin when she had got him? Pamela is a good deal afraid of her father when it comes to the point, and she would not have dared to tell him she had gone into a pawn-shop and disposed of his gift. With her little dog under her arm, she emerged from the dealer's, and whom should she run up against but Toddy—Portrush himself! He was looking rather excited; he didn't even see Pamela at first. 'What brought you here?' he asked of Pam. For answer, she displayed Chin. I believe Toddy jumped almost out of his skin with surprise. 'Why,' he exclaimed, 'I had come here to buy Chin for myself! Nuggets—that's the dealer—said he would not let me have him for less than four hundred pounds. And here is the cheque' (Toddy brought it out of his pocket-book) 'for the amount.' Poor Pamela faltered. After plucking up her courage, she told Toddy the whole story, how she had pawned her pearls on the impulse of the moment, and yet dared not show Chin at home for fear of her father's displeasure. What was she to do with the dog now?

"Toddy could not bear to see Beauty in distress, and promised, on the spot, to take Chin to his home and cherish him for her sake. So Pamela relinquished the treasure that she had just acquired, only begging



that Toddy would bring the pet very often to call upon her. On the following morning, a registered packet was sent to Pamela through the post. I need hardly say it contained her pearls, which Tod had bought back for her. Pam, although a modern girl, as I have shown, had been too strictly brought up to like to accept the pearls from a young man, and passed many a sleepless night, telling no one of her secret. At last, she wrote to Tod: 'I do not feel it is fair; I cannot take your gift.' And Tod wrote back that *all* was fair in love and war, and, if she could only learn to love him as he loved her, no such objection could exist on her part. He brought Chin to see her again, and the silly things ended by coming to an understanding over that little beast. 'I can't bear to part with Chin,' declared she, as Tod was about to leave the house with him. 'If we were to marry,' whispered Tod, 'neither of us need part with him.' 'He was mine first,' said Pam, rather lamely. 'Ah! but he's mine now by right,' said Tod, 'by right of my love for you. I know I could make you happy. So I mean to keep Chin. Your only way of getting him for

your own is by becoming my wife.' 'Nonsense!' said Pamela. 'You are taking a mean advantage of me. I will never marry you, so Chin can never be mine.' At that moment, Tod, who was carrying the dog, set him down and made a sign to him. The little fellow wagged his bushy tail, cast up his very human and lovely brown eyes at Pamela, and, sitting up on his squat hind-legs, *begged*, fluttering his front-paws as he looked at her. 'How deevy!' murmured Pamela. 'He's simply too perfect!' 'He's begging of you to love me,' said Tod: 'Oh! I saw you make a sign. You trained him to do it,' answered Pamela. Tod blushed to the roots of his flaxen hair. 'Well, even if I did,' he went on, 'is your heart really as hard as a stone?'

"It's the old, old story. Of course, Pamela's heart was not quite so hard as a stone. Tod's a great dear and a great catch. And in a fortnight they will be married. Ah! my dear friend, here comes the post. My letters—and one from Jane. Will you excuse me?"

## THE FAME OF BLOTER.

A man he was of meek and milky mien,  
To whom life seemed an unearned "Birthday Honour."  
By Fortune's glance he strove to be unseen;  
Lurking from Luck, he never called upon her.  
Back-streets of earth observed him stroll serene,  
Ne'er the recipient when Fame was donor:  
From popularity none seemed remoter  
Than unassuming, modest Jabez Bloter.

And eke his family: they loved retreat  
(Now, Bloter owned a quiver quite congested);  
None ever sought Distinction down their street,  
Or strove to outstrip those with whom it nested.  
They bloomed apart—as daisies shyly sweet  
Have oft the margin of a whirlpool crested.  
Ah me! That Destiny should thus unmuzzle  
In the fair seeming of a Picture Puzzle.

For, mark you, they were not immune from hope—  
The smallest ant in time may scale Parnassus;  
They dimly saw a fairy field where scope  
For browsing could be utilised by asses.  
A chance with which a Bloter brain could cope,  
An easy short-cut to the leisured classes:  
This was their secret thought; unheeding strictures,  
They went in heart and soul for Puzzle Pictures.

'Twas *Pot Luck's Weekly*. Jabez bought the page  
That pictured hidden names of Railway Stations;  
War with the wily Artist did he wage,  
Assisted by the pick of his relations.  
"Bradshaw" approved him right at every stage,  
Great was the strain of mental agitations;  
He stormed each station by warfare guerilla,  
And won Five Pounds a-week and "Pot Luck Villa."

Rang out his name throughout a frowning land  
(The brain of England, mark you, had competed),  
And when J. Bloter, in his flowing hand  
(Yielding a photograph), the gift receipted—  
More! When his "Life" appeared in great demand,  
Surely he roared where erstwhile he had bleated;  
His early modesty declined to zero  
And pride upheld him in the post of hero.

Then shrieked the office and stood still the home,  
Loud were the sniffs when papers interviewed him;  
Old friends declared they'd like to "cut his comb,"  
And with demands for trifling loans pursued him.  
Nightly alone he had perforce to roam—  
Strange that his family did so elude him!  
But ah! green jealousy was there implanted,  
A private trumpet-blast of Fame *each* wanted.

What! Was it meet that Fame's best dithyramb  
Should butter Jabez and omit his Jenny?  
And should posterity flout Uncle Sam,  
Who'd leave to it a very pretty penny?  
And little Jim—at present in the "pram"—  
Such 'cuteness sure had not been seen in many:  
Should these be left in this unsung condition?  
The answer roused a famous competition.

They would be famous. Each would climb the Hill,  
For public recognition keenly trying;  
His wife, with futile envy, felt quite ill,  
Till Anger whispered, as she lay a-crying,  
"Why not be sponsor to a Patent Pill?"  
She saw her reputation skyward flying—  
To seize the Cat of Fame and quickly bell it,  
She testimonialised a Purple Pellet.

Bloter was crushed. His wife assumed his sway—  
For praising Pills her cheques were really heavy;  
Imaginary interviews each day  
Were handed to reporters quite a bevy.  
Her interesting features, chastely gay,  
Made millions rush, on Pills to make a levy;  
In all advertisements she was a fixture,  
Till Aunt Jemima "boomed" a Backache Mixture.

Thus did the Bloters bravely rise to arms!  
The world around surveyed the splendid tussle;  
The girls in curly corsets showed their charms,  
The boys for patent foods displayed their muscle.  
The gamut of each invalid's alarms  
They ran with nostrums, fired with Yankee hustle  
(Here, Hist'ry writes down Gwendolen a scorer,  
She absolutely *made* a Hair-restorer).

This easy road to popular esteem  
Assured them Fame, undying and unchanging:  
What though their praises of a tonic seem  
Oft on the side of fiction to be ranging?  
To think of pleasing all is all a dream,  
Public from Pills, at least, there's no estranging—  
Who could resist a perfume ultra-Rimmel-ly  
With Katie's signature in blue facsimile?

We leave them now round one world-famous table:  
Old Jabez by his grateful Country's knighted,  
And oft he'll tell the half-believed-in fable  
How he was once with unknown name delighted;  
And happy infants, though to speak unable,  
Each to the fam'ly enterprise is plighted,  
For baby-foods they puff—with chubby laughter—  
In printed photos, marked "Before" and "After."

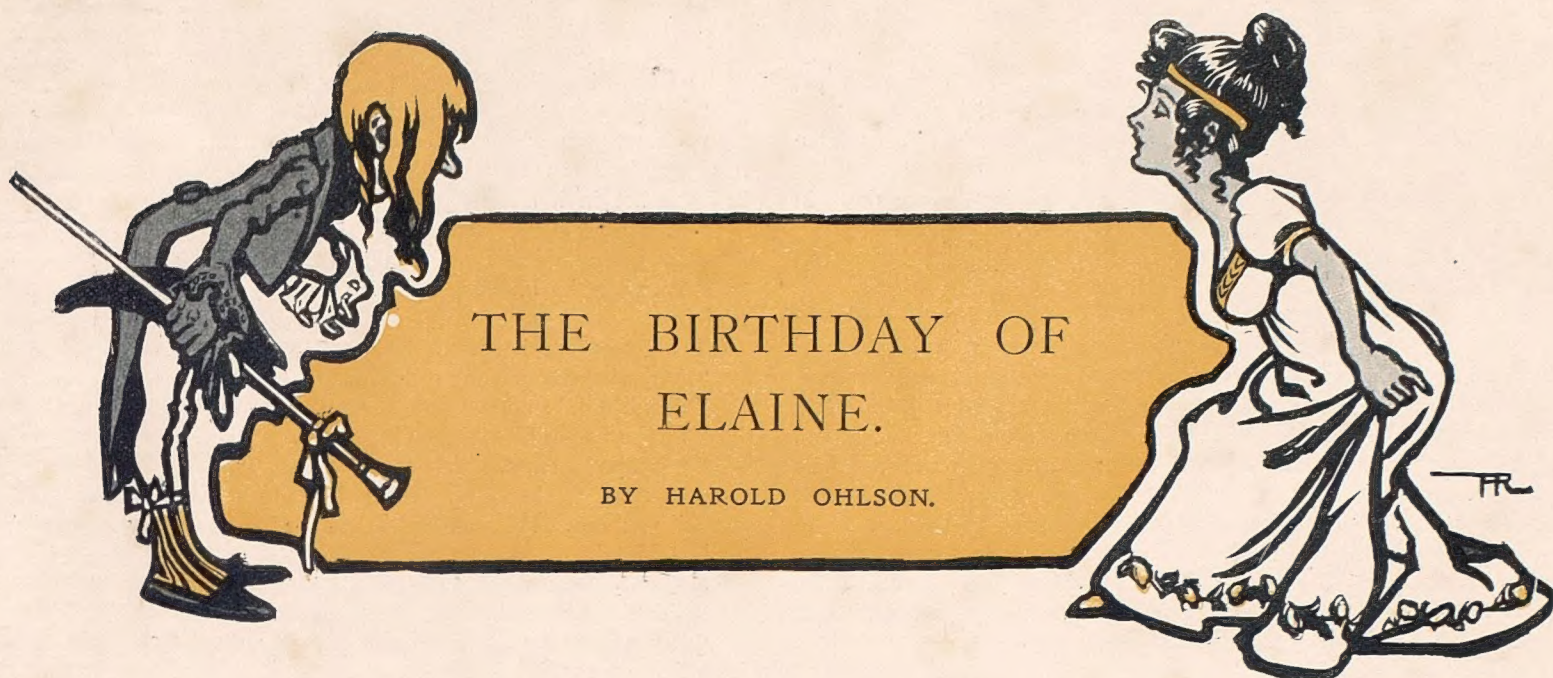
ARTHUR STURGESS.

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SHE was not christened Elaine: John Farge called her that. The conduct of her parents in the matter he had not hesitated to describe as abominable, and when her mother pointed out that the name she had given was her own and her mother's before her, he argued that, if the family had such a skeleton in the cupboard, it was time to bury it, and that the sins of the grandmother should not be visited— Well, he spoke disrespectfully of grandmothers.

Besides, she shared the name with the cook: probably with many cooks.

"How can you face the prospect," he had cried, "of calling your child's name, and being filled with the horror of the flocking of many cooks?"

So, at the time when her frocks were slowly creeping down to her ankles, John Farge came back from overseas, and named her Elaine: "Elaine the fair; Elaine the lovable; Elaine the lily maid." For her skin was white as cream, and she was slim and graceful as any old-time Dryad who danced to the pipes of Pan.

She had early declared her intention never to marry. Friends—male friends—had not been wanting who described such sentiments as cruel; others, older men, as ridiculous. But Elaine said she would much rather be ridiculous than be married, and let the matter go at that. Only her mother smiled, because she had not forgotten the time when she was a maid herself; and her father laughed, and went fishing with Elaine, and watched her cast a fly with the lightest and lithest of rods, and, when her basket grew heavier than his own, said that, if even the cold-blooded fish died to please her, what would the men do?

There can only be experienced keen regret at the necessity of turning from Elaine for a moment to consider Lord Edenbridge. It was on her eighteenth birthday that he was giving some details of his family history to John Farge and Bertie in the orchard. His Lordship ordered his conversation with an airy irresponsibility that his friends called delightful, and his creditors, when they sought him on matters of business, exasperating.

He had driven over early that afternoon to ring joy-bells—he said so—on the occasion of the birthday of Elaine, and a chance remark of John Farge's had called forth an effort of memory from the noble Lord at which Bertie was obviously bored. He had loathed Lord Edenbridge from their first meeting, and if he could not at once assign a motive for his dislike, he was soon to discover one that was all-sufficient.

"My wife died a few years after our marriage," sighed his Lordship.

John Farge nodded. It was so obviously the best thing she could have done.

"My daughter ran away with my gamekeeper. He could keep game. I don't think he can keep my daughter."

"You haven't inquired?" asked Bertie.

"I have not wished to intrude on their privacy and—er—domestic bliss. I presume the bliss."

"If she is the wife of a good man—," began John Farge.

"It is better than being the daughter of a—than being my daughter," said Lord Edenbridge, laughing softly. "May be; but I

think she liked me, though I was her father. It is not fashionable to like your parents nowadays."

"Was she your only child?" queried Farge, more from a sense of politeness than interest.

"I had a son."

"He is—dead?"

"I don't know. He married a charming lady—an actress. She has had several husbands, all, I believe, happily living."

Bertie yawned widely and got up from his chair. It was from his more exalted position that he could see Elaine opening the gate of the orchard. He hurried through the trees to meet her.

"Don't come in, Elaine," he said; "Edenbridge is there, talking to John Farge. Come for a walk; none of your guests will be here for an hour yet."

Elaine hesitated for a moment.

"Can't we—carry off Mr. Farge?"

To walk in the meadows with John Farge was to read in the book of Nature and learn her secrets. Elaine scarcely acknowledged to herself the charm of his companionship.

"He's all right," said Bertie; "he's learning the family history of the Edenbridges. He could write a book about it, only it wouldn't be fit for publication."

So they wandered in the meadows: eighteen and twenty-one. And Bertie chattered gaily, and looked very handsome, as an officer of the King's Navy should do. But Elaine often forgot him, and thought of John Farge, with his square, solemn face, and deep voice.

It was a merry party at dinner that evening. John Farge made a little birthday speech, ending it with a few lines of poetry he had found in his heart and written down, but which may not be given here, although they were very beautiful and Elaine remembers them to this day. Bertie contributed chatter that, if not witty, was always bright and never ill-natured; and several young ladies temporarily lost their hearts to the handsome middy; while Lord Edenbridge forgot to be cynical and made a very good dinner. Elaine sat next her father, at the head of the table, very pleased and happy. Only her mother was glad and sorry, happy and unhappy; for it is part of the tragedy of motherhood that children cannot always be children.

It was an hour after dinner when Bertie came to John Farge in the smoking-room.

"Come out, Farge," said he. "I'm tired of talking to a gang of girls, and Elaine's lost."

"Lost!"

"Oh, keep cool!" urged Bertie. "Edenbridge is lost too."

John Farge said nothing, but followed Bertie into the garden.

"What's it mean?" demanded that young gentleman, as they entered the orchard, having avoided the rest of the party. "I saw Edenbridge talking to Elaine just as we finished dinner, and they've been as thick as thieves ever since. Now they've vanished—clean gone; I've looked in every part of the grounds."

It was not from lack of interest that John Farge did not reply. It may, however, have been but a trick of the fading light that made his face look very white.



"I say," continued Bertie, "you don't think she's likely to—? No; that would be damnable!"

"I do not think Elaine would care for Lord Edenbridge—in that way," said Farge.

"Of course not! She could never stand him. He's been a beast, and he's fifty—it's absurd to think for a minute——!"

Bertie broke off sharply, and gripped John Farge's arm as if he would crush it. "Look!" he gasped.

For a moment there was silence, the two staring before them in blank amazement. Then Farge drew Bertie away.

"It is not right to play the spy," he said, quietly. "Let us go back to the others."

It was a strange picture they had seen, clouded by the dusk but plainly visible—Lord Edenbridge holding the hands of Elaine, and she, even as they watched, raising her face to his and kissing him.

From the window of his bedroom, a few minutes later, John Farge saw Elaine and Lord Edenbridge cross the lawn and enter the house. He felt stunned; incapable of the effort of realising the event and its consequences, caring only to be alone for the luxury of silence and relief from the intolerable strain of sorrow that must be hidden.

But, as he leant out of the window, Elaine came on the terrace below, looking about her as if seeking someone. For a moment he watched her silently; then, although his mind had been fixed not to speak with her again that night, he called softly—

"Elaine! Elaine!"

She looked up quickly.

"Why, what are you doing up there?" she cried. "Come down at once!"

So, realising that his mind, with the great renunciation it had achieved, was but a poor thing, John Farge went down.

"I am the happiest girl in the world to-night," said Elaine, as they sat together on the terrace. "Everyone is so good to me!"

"More presents?" queried Farge.

"Oh, a wonderful present—the best of them all!"

Gloom settled more deeply still on John Farge. His own present was included in "them all." His voice was mournful when he said he was glad.

"You will understand in a minute," said Elaine, quick to notice his trouble. "I have a story to tell."

"Who gave you this wonderful thing—whatever it is? Who has made you so happy?"

"Lord Edenbridge," answered Elaine.

"Umph!" grunted John Farge.

"I believe you are sorry I am happy. I think you're cross."

"Not a bit. Won't you get on with the story?"

"You've heard of Lord Edenbridge's daughter who ran away with one of the gamekeepers on his estate a few miles from here?"

Well, she's living in the village, awfully poor, because her husband died a year after they were married. I found out who she was a little time ago, and what do you think I've done?"

"Heaven knows!" cried Farge; adding, more softly, "it's sure to be something Heaven would know."

"I told Lord Edenbridge all about it; took him to the village after dinner this evening—I chose my birthday purposely—and he has promised, as her husband is dead, to forgive his daughter and put her in her right place again."

Not a muscle of John Farge's square face had moved; there must be more to hear.

"So, after the birthday feasting, the Queen liberated a prisoner," said he.

The Queen nodded gleefully.

"And what did you say to his Lordship when he was so kind?"

"Shan't tell," said the Queen, saucily. "I—thanked him."

"In the orchard," added John Farge.

Up jumped Elaine.

"You saw?" she cried. Then, before he could speak, "I don't care if you did. He was a dear, and I'll never hear a word said against him."

She sat down again, and there was silence for a moment.

Suddenly, Elaine, who had been thinking, broke out—

"If you saw—and didn't know—you thought—Oh, no, you couldn't have thought that?"

"But if I did think that?"

"I should never care for any man well enough to—kiss him—because I cared for him," announced Elaine, with conviction.

"Such a thing has been done," suggested John Farge, thoughtfully.

He had risen, and was leaning with his elbow on the parapet, looking down on Elaine, lying back in her chair.

"You're sure—never?" he asked, presently.

There was certainly a momentary hesitation—and John Farge noticed it—before she answered. She had incautiously looked up. He was looking down.

But Elaine said again, "I'm quite sure—never!"

Next morning, as Elaine was tending her garden, she was thinking of certain matters and singing softly the while. His Lordship had gone to town, and with him his daughter. Elaine was not to be Lady Edenbridge. Well, she sang none the less happily for that. And Bertie had departed to join his ship, not to return for many months. She liked Bertie and would be glad to see him again. John Farge, too, had gone, and Elaine stopped singing when she thought of that. But he was coming back; just three days—long they would be, but only days, after all.

And Elaine went on singing.

